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Donald Pippin

A POCKETFUL OF WRY: AN IMPRESARIO'S LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO AND  
THE HISTORY OF THE POCKET OPERA, 1950S-2001

With an Introduction by  
Gwyn Sullivan

Interviews Conducted by  
Caroline C. Crawford  
in 1996 and 1997

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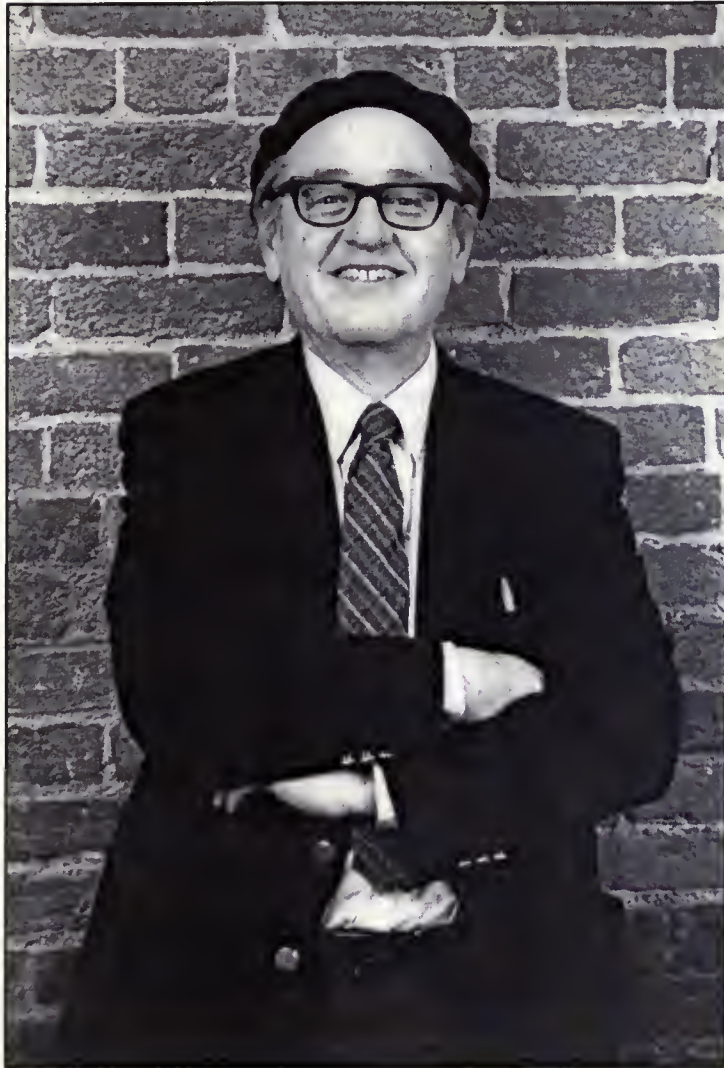
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Donald Pippin, Artistic Director of Pocket Opera.

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Introduction by Gwyn Sullivan, Pocket Opera founding board member.

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## INTRODUCTION--by Gwyn Sullivan

These interviews with Donald Pippin are full of wonderful stories and talk and Bay Area music history. No surprise they are so entertaining, when Pippin's witty narratives and translations for his Pocket Opera have delighted audiences for two and a half decades. This oral history reads like a novel. Its story has a one-damn-thing-after-another quality, with cliffhangers urging us from chapter to chapter. Like an eighteenth-century fiction it has a huge cast--a tale of our musical city--and feels powerfully as if it had a goal, a purpose that works through the amazing twists and turns of the plot's momentum. It's Pippin picaresque.

Pippin's life story has been a pilgrim's progress, and nothing if not serendipitous from the beginning. This concert pianist seems to have floated, almost accidentally, late in his career, into opera. After early years in North Carolina and New York, where he accompanied classes of Balanchine's School of American Ballet, Pippin arrived in San Francisco in the 1950s minus money and management. Like most pianists he did not immediately find a showcase for his talents. So he created one. He started a series of his own recitals--often with two different programs a week--at North Beach's hungry i, and, later, at Opus One where, almost to his own surprise, he became a part owner.

Noticing the city's paucity of live chamber music, he added it to his own concerts. Of course he featured a core of classical and romantic music, but he also pioneered the medieval and baroque. He presented modern and contemporary work, often by California composers. Pippin's development as manager and musician has been free-floating over the decades. Often he has settled into one locale, only to be driven out by earthquake, financial setback, or fierce competition for performing space--he once had to share a stage with a huge bedroom set for *Torch Song Trilogy*.

But there were periods of greater stability. At The Old Spaghetti Factory beginning in the sixties, he was an ongoing impresario for nineteen years. The Sunday Evening concerts, as Pippin christened the series, became the city's primary home of chamber music. It lacked institutional muscle. There was only one person, Donald Pippin, handling all matters musical, financial and organizational. He alone was its administrative infrastructure. He was winging it, but he was able to draw upon Bay Area freelancers and orchestra professionals eager for the intimacy and pleasures of chamber music.

Unlike most small music ventures, his lasted. In the late sixties, he began presenting Handel's Italian operas. These have slowly

become favorites everywhere, so that even large organizations do them, but in the sixties audiences generally thought them dull and dusty. Pippin has always loved Handel's exuberance. As the arias do not move the plot, he performs them in Italian, but connects them in English. He narrates and explains the stories. Fortunately, this oral history captures the amusement and seriousness he brings to this work. Some critics have compared the soft-spoken maestro to Anna Russell--misleadingly, for while Pippin can be hilarious, his tone has none of her wild cackle. His glee is there but muted. He does not mock the music or the emotional truth of Handel's librettos, even as he delights in their robust complexity. By then he has presented fifteen of these operas, usually two a season, with many revivals over the years.

So he had offered full-length opera--but only in Italian. As an experiment for his chamber series, he gingerly began to present one-act operas, with reduced orchestrations, in his own English versions. Most were unfamiliar works such as Mussorgsky's *The Marriage Broker* and Telemann's *Pimpinone*. By 1975 he was ready for his boldest move to date. He presented Verdi's *King for a Day*, a full-length opera which despite the fame of its composer is hardly known at all. From its success Pocket Opera was born, with a board of directors and an administration.

By now Pippin has presented fifty-four full-length operas and fourteen short ones--all in his own translations. That's a huge number. For a comparable array of opera in English you would have to travel to the British Isles, which has a tradition of performance in our own language. Pocket Opera remains scrappy and hand-to-mouth, yet its accomplishment has been solid and formidable. Moreover, many large companies have borrowed Pippin's translations, from the Kennedy Center to Houston. The Houston Grand Opera even opened its new house with Pippin's version of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Pippin's English translations for his company have become the core of his musical life. They encompass an enormous range of periods, nationalities and styles. He has done Offenbach and Smetana, Mozart and Donizetti. There has been more Verdi, such as *Luisa Miller* and *Stiffelio*. He has done Léhar, Bizet and Weber, Wagner and von Flotow and Tchaikovsky. An up-to-date list of his English versions is included in this oral history.

Pippin tells us what he admires in the original libretti--he thinks the writers often get a bad rap--and how he tries to do justice to them in his own versions. He knows the strict formal demands of a libretto are severe, like a sonnet's, but nonetheless he finds most translations gnarled and too literal. They lack energy and ease. A libretto's verse, in Pippin's view, cannot compete with the music, but neither should it just stay out of the way. Unlike poetry, which stands on its own, verse seeks to blend. It's a handmaiden to music, not a

slave. Rhyme can help, and Pippin uses it throughout. His rhyme provides a light verbal punctuation that makes an audience comfortable--or delights it if the effect is deliberately comic. Music makes rhyme more natural and fluid; it diffuses rhyme that can otherwise seem too insistent on the page.

So this oral history is the heady table talk of a long career. To an astonishing degree it captures in private what makes Pippin such a wonder in front of an audience. It's also the voice one recognizes from his translations. He is pointed, elegant, serious, witty and memorably puckish. His unforced irony doesn't exhaust you--it has an undertone of tingling mischief. It's an irony that is never brittle or chilly or superior in tone. For Pippin's voice is eager, as well as sophisticated, and arises from his natural warmth.

Gwyn Sullivan  
 Founding Board Member, Pocket Opera

December, 2000  
 San Francisco





## INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Caroline Crawford

Anyone lucky enough to be alive and young in San Francisco in the 1950s and 1960s was sure to come across Donald Pippin performing in North Beach at the hungry i or Opus One, or later on at The Old Spaghetti Factory on Green Street, where the stage was a platform the size of a dining table set on two-by-fours and a tattered standing lamp threw showers of sparks over the audience.

Donald Pippin had come from New York City to California in 1951 to work with maverick composer Harry Partch up on the north coast. When Partch left for the Bay Area, Pippin landed in San Francisco, was introduced to Enrico Banducci and invited to play the piano at Banducci's hungry i. With his customary passion he began to practice eight hours a day to prepare new pieces for the twice-weekly programs. By late 1952 Banducci was booking Stan Wilson, Mort Sahl and Jory Remus, among others, into the hungry i, and Pippin was let go. When Pippin asked if he could return and offer programs on Sundays, Banducci not only agreed but provided a generous buffet to go with what became known as the Beer, Bach and Beethoven Concerts. Forty cents bought a full afternoon of chamber music and Banducci's buffet, and the concerts drew enthusiastic audiences.

Pippin moved on to the Opus One with the Steinway grand Banducci had purchased for him (curiously Pippin had played the piano as a child in Virginia decades earlier), and eventually made his way to The Old Spaghetti Factory, where as many as two hundred patrons sat on mismatched hardbacked chairs and the fire department blinked at crowd density and heat that had audience members fainting in numbers.

In the late 1960s Pippin began to program operas, first one-act works and then on to full-length works of Handel, Mozart, Donizetti and others, performed with "surprisingly modest resources"--four to seven singers who doubled as chorus, string quartet, and keyboard continuo, and other instruments used sparingly as required. Finding English translations not quite up to snuff, Pippin immersed himself in French and Italian and began to work on English versions of a wide range of operas, translations which today number more than fifty and are borrowed by companies all over the country. As for his narrations, which have invited comparisons to Anna Russell and Victor Borge, he claims only to try to cut through Byzantine opera plots and to "concentrate on making the story as succinct as possible. The absurdities take care of themselves..." Pocket Opera was born in 1977, moved from the Spaghetti Factory in 1979, and survives today in a variety of venues with a full staff, a loyalist audience and working board of directors.

Pippin agreed to undertake the oral history in the mid-nineties and we began the interviews in November, 1996. All but one of the interviews took place in his Potrero Hill home, where I invariably interrupted an all-day Bach practice session. Occasionally passersby would pause by the bay window to listen, as I was listening before ringing the doorbell, as if they had purposely walked that way for a small and spontaneous concert.

Mr. Pippin reviewed the interview transcripts and made substantial changes (occasionally altering the interviewer's questions just slightly to better suit an expanded answer), adding lists of Pocket Opera personnel and repertoire to the text.

The resulting history, *A Pocketful of Wry: An Impresario's Life in San Francisco and the History of the Pocket Opera, 1950s-1990s*, documents North Beach in its heyday, when a loft in "Pacific Depths" could be had for one hundred dollars and working poets were plentiful, the development of Pocket Opera, thoughts about opera librettists, translations, composers and personal passions and serendipities, such as ten-hour piano lessons and the curious history of a singular Steinway piano. It is the story of a remarkable life in music.

The Donald Pippin oral history was funded by several donors who contributed to the general music fund. The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs The Bancroft Library's materials on the history of California and the West. The office is an administrative division of The Bancroft Library.

Caroline Crawford  
Music Interviewer/Editor

February 2001  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
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# I CHILDHOOD, FAMILY, EDUCATION, EARLY CAREER: 1926-1944

[Interview 1: November 6, 1996] ##<sup>1</sup>

*Zebulon, North Carolina; Introduction to Music and Piano; A Move to Richmond, Virginia, 1938; Grandmother Laws and Summers at Lake George; Studying at Harvard, 1942-1944; Life in Greenwich Village and Accompanist for the Vilzak-Schollar Ballet School and Balanchine's School of American Ballet; Piano Study with Israel Citkowitz*

Crawford: I'd like to start by asking you what in your early years led you to music. Was there musical talent in your family?

Pippin: There may have been buried talent--talent that was never exposed to the light. My grandfather, who looked somewhat like an aged Uncle Sam, was a very reticent man--in fact, I don't remember ever hearing him utter a word. We lived in a small town in North Carolina, and we used to go away for the summers to join my mother's family in upstate New York. He stayed at our house one summer while we were gone. Before we left, he told my mother that she could turn off the electricity. He would not be using it. Of course, she didn't turn it off, but nonetheless he was true to his word.

The neighbors, ever vigilant, reported that they never once saw the lights go on. They also reported something strange: every evening after dark they would hear the sound of the piano. The music would go on for hours, soft and beautiful. The old man was evidently playing to himself, confident that no one could see, no one could hear. We came back in September, he returned to his own quarters--quarters that I don't remember

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<sup>1</sup>## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

ever seeing--and I'm sure he never touched a piano again. I am equally sure that he had never touched a piano before.

Crawford: Was he known to be musical?

Pippin: How can you accuse a decent man of such a failing? A book came out a few years ago called *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. [laughter] Nor do they play the piano. It's well known that the Victorian lady had to be scrupulously careful in order to keep her reputation intact, but the restrictions on a man's conduct were at least as stringent. The risk of losing one's virility was just as perilous as a lady's risk of losing her virtue. Do I dare smell a rose?

Crawford: You assume he had wanted to play.

Pippin: I'm not at all sure that he would acknowledge the temptation. But alone in the dark--ah!

Crawford: He was your mother's father?

Pippin: No, my father's father. His mother, my grandmother, I don't remember at all. I believe she died before I was born [December, 1926]. I was told that she had an extraordinarily sweet, cheerful disposition. Eventually the mother of four children, she was never able to walk because as an infant she had been left unattended, too close to an open fire. Both of her feet were burned off. She never went to school; she was illiterate. Who knows what treasures lie concealed inside a box that's never been opened?

In my early years, we had no piano, but every Sunday we visited relatives--an uncle's house, a farmhouse--with an upright piano in the living room, and so I would play the piano all day, long before I started to take lessons.

Crawford: Reading music?

Pippin: Nothing so prosaic! No, I played like a virtuoso, flailing away. God knows what came out. The grownups discreetly shut the door, no doubt to preserve their own sanity, and I was left on my own. I felt completely at home with the piano and gradually discovered that I could pick out the few simple tunes I knew, which of course was very exciting. But mostly I seem to have gotten endless pleasure from just banging away.

At the age of seven, I was given a choice of whether to take lessons in Expression or Piano. I chose Expression! Who knows what magic door would open? I never found out because

the Expression class never materialized, and as a result I didn't start piano lessons till a year later in the third grade, when I was not quite eight--a fortunate postponement, I believe. Starting earlier is usually not a good idea, unless one happens to be Mozart.

We still didn't have a piano, but I would go to other people's houses to practice. I took to it immediately, partly because it was one of the few games that I seemed to be good at. Within a year, I was seriously interested and in a couple of years I was a fanatic.

Crawford: Without parental prompting?

Pippin: Quite the contrary. My mother would have much preferred that I spend my time outdoors playing.

Crawford: Music was all-encompassing.

Pippin: It became the central interest in my life. Though in this new land, I was still something of an alien from outer space. For example, when I was about ten, I discovered that one could actually purchase music. There was a company called Century that put out a selection of piano solos for fifteen cents apiece, which I began gradually to acquire. And then I discovered G. Schirmer, which published the entire Beethoven Sonatas, the collected Preludes and Nocturnes of Chopin, and things like that. The big problem was money. This was in the Depression era and we were poor. Although the family had sort of an aura of gentility, the foundations were shaky. My father's livelihood was extremely erratic.

Crawford: What was his occupation?

Pippin: He'd done a number of things. In the early years he was part owner of a chair factory, which reproduced models of patterns that had been developed in the rural South. Old-fashioned furniture, simple, severe and well made. We still have some of it and it remains as sturdy as it was seventy years ago.

Crawford: That's a big industry in North Carolina?

Pippin: I don't think it ever rose to that level of grandeur. But discovering and cultivating handicrafts and finding ways to market them became one of my father's great interests.

One night, around 1935, the chair factory burned down. With few prospects in Zebulon, my father went to Washington, where he became enmeshed in the New Deal. His goal was to

create interest and generate support for his handicrafts project. But the New Deal, for all the great things that can be said for it, was chaotic and in constant flux. One never knew from one day to the next whether one's job still existed.

Crawford: But did he find help for the artisans?

Pippin: Well, he certainly tried. For several years.

Crawford: The Depression. Hard times.

Pippin: Especially in the rural South. As I said, we were of the gentility. We did not make our own soap. Nor did we keep chickens, not to mention pigs, in the front yard. We wore shoes, even on weekdays. And we had a radio! On principle, my brother, my sister and I were given money--an allowance of twenty-five cents a week.

Crawford: Enough to buy music?

Pippin: No, this did not satisfy my hunger for music, but we were also given fifteen cents a day for lunch.

Crawford: Ah, I know where this story is going to end. [laughter]

Pippin: My misappropriation of funds went on for months till I was finally discovered.

Crawford: By an inexplicable loss of weight.

Pippin: It seemed that I was getting listless in the afternoons.

Crawford: You were feeding your soul.

Pippin: My fanatic soul. My teacher was easygoing and undisciplined--supportive, encouraging, but giving the loosest kind of guidance. This, incidentally, I think is by no means the worst way to start out. Concealed within, there must have been a sterner, grittier side to her nature. In college, she had practiced two hours a day and six hours a day on weekends, until her wrists collapsed. I was resolved to do the same. And for the most part I did. Never mind the wrists.

Crawford: Would you like to mention her name and give her some fame?

Pippin: Mrs. Dwight Barbee. In the seventh grade I was taken to a more exacting teacher in Raleigh, twenty miles away. Distances were much more formidable in those days.

Crawford: How did you travel?

Pippin: By train or bus. I would go to Raleigh on Saturdays to take a piano lesson with Miss May Crawford at Meredith College. I thought it a grand thing indeed to be going to college, and I adored Miss Crawford, who normally did not take children. She brought me back to a much simpler level--it was like being demoted several grades in school. But she did it in a way that I found thoroughly acceptable, exciting and challenging: "Dare we try a Chopin Nocturne?" Or "You know, I *think* a Beethoven Sonata, but there are only three that I could trust you with at this point. You can choose."

Crawford: Oh, lovely. So which did you choose?

Pippin: The very first--Op. 2, No. 1. But life was soon to change. My parents were getting a divorce. I didn't know this till a year or so later.

Crawford: Because your father had been living away?

Pippin: That's right. They were never really compatible, and I'm sure that one reason my father was so eager always to find work elsewhere was because he wanted the separation.

Crawford: That was difficult.

Pippin: Very much so for my mother, to whom divorce was scandalous and disgraceful, indicating a way of life that was strictly confined to Hollywood movie stars. So it seemed to practically everyone in the world that we lived in. Although my mother had good friends in Zebulon, she never dared appear in Zebulon again after the divorce--though I imagine this said more about her own sense of moral propriety than Zebulon's.

As for her family, they saw my father along the lines of the villain in a melodrama, who seduces and abandons the innocent virgin. But feelings aside, it meant that she had to find a way of earning a living. To my relatives' horror, the divorce settlement contained no provision for child support.

Crawford: How old were you and your brother at the time?

Pippin: My brother is two years older, and I was twelve--it was 1938. So my mother went back to nursing school for a brush-up, which meant the family moving to Richmond, Virginia. For me, this was like dying and going to heaven.

Crawford: Big city.



Pippin: Lights, action, music! This was what I had truly longed for. In Zebulon, nothing happened! Access to music was almost nonexistent. Still, unlike most families, we did have a radio, and there was a program on Sunday afternoons called *The Magic Key*, which would generally feature about ten minutes of fine music. I remember to this day some of the things I heard.

Crawford: Crumbs.

Pippin: Yes, but crumbs from a rich cake. And these crumbs have probably nourished me for the rest of my life. I remember the first movement of the Mendelssohn G Minor Piano Concerto played by Serkin. I remember Rosenthal playing the Chopin E Major Nocturne, also the middle movement of his E Minor Concerto. You know, when you hear very little, what you do hear makes a formidable impression. But aside from this, there was one major oasis. When I was about ten, my mother, doing the ironing, turned on the Metropolitan Opera.

Crawford: The Saturday broadcasts.

Pippin: That's right. Till then, I had blindly accepted the only opinion I had ever heard expressed. Opera was a subject strictly for satire, the incarnation of snobbery, social pretension and boredom. To my amazement, I was entranced. That first opera was *Die Walküre*.

Crawford: You still remember your first opera.

Pippin: I listened every Saturday from that point on, until the trips to Raleigh made it impossible. How I combined this with six hours of practice I have no idea, but I did. During that year, I remember *Lucia*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Norma*, *La Traviata*. The only one that I did not like was *Siegfried*. In fact I even turned it off about half way through.

Crawford: You had liked *Die Walküre*.

Pippin: But *Siegfried* is another matter. The first hour or so, I believe, is entirely male voices, which I found harsh and unappealing, altogether too guttural!

Crawford: So you've never translated it?

Pippin: No. In fact, I didn't hear *Siegfried* again until nearly sixty years later, and I'm ashamed to say that I liked the first half about as little as I had before. And I still like *Die Walküre* as much as ever.

Crawford: So Richmond was another story.

Pippin: My dream come true! By this time, thanks to Miss Crawford's wise and patient nurturing, I played the piano quite well for my age. I was taken to a teacher said to be Richmond's finest. His name was Quincy Cole, and he immediately took a shine. My mother had to be frank about our finances. He charged nine dollars a month for lessons, a truly forbidding sum.

Crawford: So it must have been in those days.

Pippin: A hurdle, but not insurmountable. Mr. Cole claimed to have a benefactor who had offered scholarships to a limited number of students. He would call and find out if the benefactor would consider another scholarship. Well, sure enough, he did.

Crawford: Mr. Cole must have been impressed with you.

Pippin: He was a generous, outgoing person. We immediately started with three lessons a week--an unheard of schedule--and I was his bright boy. The lessons were long and usually at the end of the day, after which he would drive me home. In the car we would have long conversations in which he would tell me about the old-school pianists he had heard and known as a student in Berlin. To me, they were like the gods of the Pantheon. It was a time, prior to World War I, when Berlin was truly a great musical center, especially for pianists. Here the great ones gathered. Mr. Cole knew many of them and had many stories to tell. Especially to an audience as fascinated as myself.

Crawford: Who were his teachers?

Pippin: Josef Lhevinne and Rudolf Breithaupt, primarily. But he was well acquainted with idols like Schnabel, Cortot, Moiseivitch, Theresa Carreno, and--king of the gods--Paderewski.

Crawford: Were recordings of their performances available?

Pippin: They existed, but for me they were not very accessible. At the time, a single 78 (seven or eight minutes of music) cost two dollars. Translate that into modern currency! However, at this point I did get a phonograph, that came with twelve records--twelve 78s of one's own choosing.

Crawford: I imagine you remember what you chose.

Pippin: Oh, indeed I do. Cortot playing the Chopin F Minor Fantasy, also the first and second impromptus, Harold Bauer playing the *Appassionata*, Jose Iturbi playing the Mozart A Major Sonata,

Horowitz, the E flat Sonata of Haydn, and a few others. All piano. And of course I listened to them incessantly.

Well, after a year's refresher course in Richmond, my mother got a job as a public health nurse on Long Island, and the family moved on.

Crawford: Without you?

Pippin: Mr. Cole wanted me to stay in Richmond and continue studying with him, and strangely, my mother agreed. And so I wound up in a boarding house, the home of an elderly lady named Mrs. Flipppo. The other boarders were a couple of old ladies who daily fought the Civil War, along with Mrs. Flipppo.

It's amazing, because although they were old, they were not *that* old. The Civil War had certainly been concluded ten years or so before they were born.

Crawford: But not for Mrs. Flipppo.

Pippin: Far from it. It was a daily indignation. The defeat of the South was an indelible stain that each day they tried to remove. My own participation was remote, to say the least, and I would usually get away from meals as fast as possible.

Crawford: Was there a symphony orchestra in Richmond?

Pippin: No, Richmond was not quite the mecca for the arts that I supposed. Still, in comparison with Zebulon, it was Athens in its heyday. [laughter] But the National Symphony in Washington gave about three concerts a year there. In fact, I was a soloist in one of them.

Crawford: You played a concerto?

Pippin: The Saint-Saens Fourth Concerto. Before that, I had played the MacDowell D Minor Concerto with the Norfolk Symphony. And I must say that the reviews for that were quite sensational and convinced everybody, including me, that I had no choice but to become a concert pianist. I'd never before really taken this as a serious possibility.

Crawford: Why not?

Pippin: I think partly it was a legacy of the South. I assumed that a concert career was for the giants that lived elsewhere. Coming from a backwater, this was a world that we could not hope to enter. My passion for music was undirected. I could envision



myself becoming a teacher, but that was about as far as I could stretch it.

Crawford: So you didn't seek these performances. You were invited.

Pippin: I didn't seek them, but Mr. Cole did. He was most intent on promoting my career.

Crawford: It was marvelous that you found him.

Pippin: So it was at the beginning, but it was not so marvelous later on. Because the most unexpected thing happened--I lost interest.

Crawford: Burnt out maybe. Isn't that what we would say today?

Pippin: Perhaps. It was painful, bewildering, embarrassing. I felt that I was letting a lot of people down. But there was no getting around it. The fire had gone out. There were many factors, but for one thing, I was becoming interested in other things. It was also tied up with my disillusionment with Mr. Cole, whom I had so thoroughly idealized. Idealization is always dangerous!

Like young people the world over, I was mercilessly intolerant of human frailty. Generously forgiving in the abstract, but woe to the person close at hand who falls short. Mr. Cole was certainly caring and concerned, but he was also shallow and narrow-minded. He was a snob. He was anti-Semitic, which absolutely baffled me, especially considering how many gods in the pianistic pantheon were Jews.

His approach to music was geared mainly to showmanship. I often felt that I was being trained like an animal on display. In his world, a concert career barred everything else. Anything that was not the piano was an unnecessary and unwelcome distraction. So the choice became clear: is it to be the piano, where you're literally a caged animal showing off, or are you going to explore life? Are you going to live?

Crawford: Did he play well?

Pippin: I did not like his playing, which was another sore point that stiffened my rebellion. He was always after a big, big tone. That's fine if you can do it, but unless you're very careful, unless you let the tone grow naturally through daily cultivation, it simply becomes insensitive banging. Practicing became like hammering nails. Despite all this, I stayed with him for four years, because I really liked living in Richmond.

Crawford: You were in high school at that time?

Pippin: Yes, and that was where life was opening up. I did not question Mr. Cole's authority. I thought that his approach was probably the way it had to be, but I didn't want to do it. It was not for me. I would still try to practice every day, but where I used to practice for hours at a time, now I could barely hold out for ten minutes. The soul had gone completely out of it.

Of course, he was dismayed and confounded because my progress which had started with such promise was going downhill so rapidly. And so a kind of friction developed, parent and rebellious child, where both are tugging and the knot gets tighter. Oddly enough, my feeling for music took an unexpected turn. For some reason, I developed a burning passion for the German language.

I loved German because it was the language of Beethoven, of Mozart, of Schubert, composers that my musical study had completely abandoned. I was now in the world of Saint-Saens, of Liszt, cadenzas and concerti. But somehow or other, German took me back to the sacred source, and for a couple of years it almost replaced music. I also became interested in journalism and in creative writing in general.

Crawford: This was all taking place in the context of school?

Pippin: And also in the context of feeling that it was expected, assumed that I was to be a pianist, that this was my preordained destiny.

Oh, yes, I took myself quite seriously! Furthermore, I could not forget that my mother had made huge sacrifices to prepare me for a musical career, by now the last thing I wanted.

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Crawford: Your mother had moved to Long Island?

Pippin: With my older brother and younger sister.

Crawford: Is that where her family was?

Pippin: No, she was from a very small town in upstate New York called Fort Ann, where the family roots ran deep. Part of the family tradition was a strong emphasis on education. Her mother, my grandmother, for example, was a college graduate in the 1880s.

Crawford: Remarkable.

Pippin: Almost unheard of. In the nineties, she was left a widow with five children under the age of ten and no visible means of support. Yet every one of them went to college. Of the five children, one became a doctor, another became a classics teacher at Wellesley. God alone knows how she made this happen.

Crawford: Do you remember her?

Pippin: Yes, though I never felt close to her. She grew old before her time, for understandable reasons. She was arthritic and her life had been difficult. People aged quickly in those days. So I remember her as a very old woman. My mother often said it was a pity that we never knew her as she really was.

Crawford: Did you spend holidays with her?

Pippin: We went to Lake George every summer. Around the turn of the century a great uncle had acquired some property there for very little money. At that time, places like Lake George were not nearly so desirable as they are now because they were hard to get to.

Nowadays when one can dash up from the city, such property would be almost beyond the reach of money, but back then, it was just out in nowhere. Certainly Lake George is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Yet at the time I must admit that summers weighed heavily. The school year in North Carolina was less than eight months, ending promptly at the beginning of May. Summer vacations were long, and seemed endless. There was too much time. Ever since, I have fretted that there was too little.

Crawford: There was no music?

Pippin: One of my aunts had a collection of about thirty classical records. Not LPs, of course--78s. I was the only child that was allowed to play the records because I would treat them like holy icons. I would listen to those thirty records every day, but other than that--oh, and then I eventually found a piano in a farmhouse about a mile down the road. So between that and swimming and reading--[laughter].

Crawford: You managed.

Pippin: I managed. But I've never been good at indolence. It's crazy to complain with such obvious advantages, and yet I would have

fares better, say, in a school on Manhattan, with some form of organized activity. Something challenging.

Crawford: Did you read a lot? German novels?

Pippin: No, those were still pre-German days. But I did read a lot--scads of children's books. Later on, George Eliot, Dickens, Mark Twain, et cetera.

Crawford: Was there good company at Lake George?

Pippin: Yes, very good. My mother's family was close, and so every evening the extended family gathered on the wide front porch for conversation. I don't remember anything that was ever discussed--no politics, no religion, no philosophy. Yet life seemed to provide ample and lively material. To me, it was the nicest part of the day. As you can readily see, I have much, much to be grateful for.

Crawford: You stopped going there when you were about twelve?

Pippin: By that time I was spending the summers in Richmond to concentrate intensely on the piano, although that was to become more and more a pretense. By the end of high school, it was obvious that I was not going to go on with music, so what next?

I had done well in school. In fact, I was first in my high school class, and my aunt, the one that taught at Wellesley, thought that I should go to Harvard. Looking back, this seems an amazing leap of the imagination. I was utterly naive, uninformed, and had no idea of what "going to Harvard" implied. But it was suddenly possible, because a great Aunt had died and left me five hundred dollars.

Crawford: Was she somebody that you had a close relationship with?

Pippin: Not really. In fact, I never thought that she much liked me, or for that matter anybody else. Though she claimed to prefer me to her other nephews because I was quieter. I thought it a poor recommendation. [laughter]

Crawford: It wasn't your musical genius.

Pippin: No, as long as I was quiet, I was likeable. But she did leave me five hundred dollars, which of course in those days was an awesome sum of money. A year's tuition at Harvard cost four hundred dollars. This included, of course, room and board.

Crawford: So you had a fortune!

Pippin: Beyond my wildest dreams! So I took the college entrance boards, which I remember vividly. A six-hour exam--three hours for measuring aptitude, where I presume I did all right. The other three hours were on specialized subjects. One of my subjects was Latin.

Crawford: How many years of Latin?

Pippin: Three. The exam gave us Latin paragraphs to translate, followed by questions about the contents. I could translate none of the paragraphs and felt that I would have done just as well on the test if I'd never studied Latin in my life, or if the test had been in Latvian. Pure guesswork.

On more general subjects like history and social studies I was almost equally at sea. But Harvard accepted me and gave me a scholarship. I still wonder if they got me mixed up with somebody else.

Crawford: What year did you start at Harvard?

Pippin: The fall of '42. Southern schools offered only eleven years, so I was only sixteen when I started. What a shock! For the first time, I met boys close to my own age who were vastly better educated than me, and seemed vastly more intelligent. It was like Gulliver going from the land of the Lilliputians to the Brobdingnags.

Crawford: Where had they come from?

Pippin: Some had gone to private schools, to Exeter, to Andover. But others, like myself, were the product of public schools. I was drawn to the very ones that I found most intimidating.

Crawford: You felt that you were from the provinces?

Pippin: From kindergarten was more like it. Hardly in condition to feel competitive. I was enrolled in broad lecture courses in history, literature and philosophy. It was like being taken from a backyard swimming pool and plunged into the ocean. Each of them had huge reading assignments, far more than I was able to absorb. I soon became alarmed that I might not keep the B average necessary to hold on to the scholarship.

This alarm changed into the unthinkable: Good Lord, what if I flunked out? It seemed that the harder I tried, the denser, the soggy, the more impenetrable my brain became.



No, I was not doing well, and ironically, the family was convinced that it was because I was goofing off--that I had made it to college and now it had gone to my head. Well, shameful to say, I wanted them to think that. [laughter] Better to be thought frivolous, inconsiderate, uncaring, ungrateful--any of these things, rather than stupid. Ah, youth!

Crawford: There must have been compensations.

Pippin: Indeed there were. By sheer chance, my roommate was passionately fond of music, and extraordinarily knowledgeable as well--as he was about almost all of the arts. His name was Robert Shuder, from Mill Valley. Not pedantic, not scholarly, he was driven by pure passion. He was highly unusual in another respect. At that age, even the most enthusiastic, or especially the most enthusiastic, tend to become narrowly opinionated: if they like Bach, there's no room for the romantics. Love of chamber music precludes love of opera. Mozart eliminates Schumann.

Bob would have none of this nonsense. Up to this time, my own musical education, while intense, had been extremely limited. I was barely aware of the existence of such a thing as chamber music.

Every evening after dinner, Bob would take me to a small music room with a phonograph, and we would listen to a piece of music--a trio, a quartet, a sonata. This was my reintroduction to music. I even started to play again, though I had no interest whatever in resuming study.

Crawford: You had chosen English more or less randomly?

Pippin: This was the standard choice of those who didn't know what they wanted to do. But it was a welcome discovery to find that I wanted to play the piano after all, when I could play music that was close to my heart. That year I learned much of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Crawford: You hadn't played Bach before?

Pippin: Not since the Two-part Inventions. Not a single piece. So I rediscovered music during this year, but it was a difficult year. My ego took a beating, and at the end of the second term, I wanted to leave college for two reasons. The main reason was in order to get ready to come back better prepared.

Crawford: Come back to Harvard?

Pippin: By all means. But the war was the other reason. Many of my classmates had already left to be drafted. My eighteenth birthday was approaching in December and I fully expected to be drafted as well. So it seemed best in every way to leave immediately, get a job for six months, spend as much time as I could studying, get drafted, and then--well, who could envision what would come next?

Crawford: Would you have been drafted if you were enrolled?

Pippin: Yes, that would have made no difference. Going to college was no exemption.

Crawford: Sure enough, you got your letter six months after you'd left in June. You completed your first year?

Pippin: That's right. As planned, I got a dull, undemanding job, spent my spare time reading, doing some writing and so forth. Well, the draft examination came and I guess all went well until we reached the psychiatrist. He seemed a kind, thoughtful, friendly person. He asked a good many questions.

Now I should say that at this point I had acknowledged to myself that I was homosexual, but I had not, nor would I have dreamed of acknowledging it to anyone else. I should also say that with my isolated background, I knew very, very little about this, and what I did know was appalling: that homosexuals were vampire-like creatures that lived in dark alleys, that emerged from sewers, that lurked in shadows to snatch out at the innocent unprotected young. In the few plays or stories that I'd read in which the subject came up, when a young man discovered that he had these tendencies, it was assumed that he would kill himself, or at least try.

Crawford: This didn't get straightened out at Harvard?

Pippin: Not yet. Not yet. To me, there was no question about it: if that's what I am, so be it. I have to admit as well to a cold, furtive shiver of excitement at the thought that I--such a good boy!--was in fact branded for life as an outsider, a freak and a criminal. Life might turn out to be a rather larger adventure than I had bargained on. How many thousands have faced a similar shock of recognition! But mine was a deep secret, to be disclosed to no one.

Crawford: Even at Harvard, among your friends?

Pippin: Deep silence! Later on, I discovered that many of my friends were wading through the same quagmire. But when the army

psychiatrist asked questions, I answered truthfully, but only up to a point. He never actually put the dreaded question directly. I probably thought it was because it was too unspeakable to be uttered. At the end of what I think was a fairly long interview, he said in a paternal way, "Army life will be rough. Do you think you can handle it?" And I said I thought I could.

Crawford: So you really welcomed it?

Pippin: No, I didn't welcome it, but I was not going to concede that I was unfit. I thought it was a duty that I could cope with. But mercifully, he must have thought otherwise. God knows what would have happened had this interview taken place, not in Manhattan, but in some other parts of the country. But sure enough, I was rejected on his recommendation. So this meant that I was suddenly free.

Crawford: So you had a fair share of relief.

Pippin: Yes, a fair share of relief. No, vast relief! I was prepared to go into the army, but God knows it was not something I looked forward to. Instead, I went back to Harvard, where I stayed for another year and a half. Incidentally, I do not expect to bring up the subject of sexuality again. It would be pleasant to infer from my silence that the facts were too scandalous to be made public. But in truth, I regret to say that full disclosure would be altogether too disappointing.

You will not be surprised to hear that my second encounter with college was much more rewarding than the first. Though it was still far from smooth sailing, I was no longer terrified that the boat would capsize and sink. But just imagine! Daily contact with the likes of Shakespeare, Donne, Keats, Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Blake, Swift, Chekhov, Dostoyevski, Thomas Mann.

Though I had paid dutiful homage to Shakespeare before, this was the year that started my lifetime devotion. Granville Barker gave six lectures on *Antony and Cleopatra*, acting all of the roles better than I have ever heard since. An amateur production of *Hamlet* brought the play to life. And I myself took part in a college production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Another revelation!

Returning to Harvard for a brief visit some thirty years later, I was overwhelmed by the flood of rich memories. But the more I felt opened up to a larger vision of life, the more I chafed under the restrictions that college imposed. I wanted to be free to go my own way. It became increasingly apparent



that I was not academically oriented or inclined or gifted. I tend to work obsessively at the things that interest me, and in fact I think obsessive pursuits have characterized the major part of my life.

Crawford: But passion makes the best academics, doesn't it?

Pippin: Absolutely. But my passion could not be imposed from without. And what I *cannot* do is flit around: an hour of French, an hour of history, an hour of metaphysical poetry. And unless driven by passion, there are limits to what the mind is willing to absorb. The reading assignment for one course was one hundred Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Well, if you do justice to a dozen, that's quite an achievement.

Crawford: You thought that the demands were unreasonable?

Pippin: Well, certainly more than I could cope with. The mind is a hard thing to force. If it doesn't want to go someplace, it just refuses to go there. My college career had never been particularly distinguished. But towards the end, I made the disconcerting discovery that the less I studied, the better I seemed to do--a discovery that seemed to reinforce my view that the main thing college was teaching me was to bluff.

Crawford: Preparing you for life.

Pippin: Yes, [laughs] no doubt. Yet I do aim for higher things. Again I wanted to leave college, and this time I felt quite strongly that I would not come back. And of course I've not.

Crawford: You did not plan to go elsewhere?

Pippin: What I wanted desperately was time and freedom to pursue my own interests, whatever they might wind up being. I don't know whether to call it sheer innocence or sheer stupidity, but I never for a moment considered the practical consequences of having or not having a degree. My greatest dread was getting stuck in a dull, meaningless, all-consuming nine-to-five job. But suddenly a new possibility emerged.

I heard about a friend, a pianist also, who had left college for New York, where he accompanied ballet classes for two dollars an hour. A magnificent salary! Four times what I had ever earned before. Fifteen hours a week would do it!

And so the dream came true. It was the fall of '45. The atom bomb had put an abrupt, unexpected end to the war. The country breathed a collective sigh of relief. And I got a job

in a ballet school and a room in Greenwich Village at 40 Perry Street on a ground floor--a nice, big, front room for forty dollars a month.

I was enthralled by the ballet. The Vilzak-Schollar school was headed by two Russian émigrés, distinguished dancers from the Nijinsky era--roles that they filled to perfection, volatile, tempestuous, warm-hearted and delightful. In hindsight, I see them as quintessentially operatic: what they felt, they expressed! *Molto passionato!* I loved them. The school was frequented by some of the great dancers of the day: Irina Baronova, Alicia Alonso, Igor Youskevitch, et cetera.

Anatole Vilzak was especially musical, and he wanted his classes to be fueled by a lively, inspiring musical beat. And of course that was just what I wanted to give, so I was performing for all I was worth, for three hours a day.

Crawford: Did he choose the music?

Pippin: No, I could play whatever I wanted, with certain restrictions. The music had to be in eight-bar periods, which meant that it sometimes had to be chopped a bit in order to fit. Vilzak would prescribe the rhythm and tempo, but the rest was up to me.

The New York that I found was an exhilarating change from Harvard. I was meeting people for the first time in years where intellect and erudition didn't matter. [laughter] In going to Harvard, the great revelation was in meeting people where intellect *did* matter. But it was even more of an eye-opener to meet again people where it did not.

Crawford: What did matter?

Pippin: What mattered? Oh, just being alive at the same time, in the same place. My room was rather conveniently located, so that lots of people drifted in for a casual visit--for me, a decidedly new experience. In Zebulon, music had been a protective wall. In Richmond my friends were of an older generation, with one great exception. Ben Johnston shared my interest in music and led me into other interests. At Harvard, friendships tended to be strained by intellectual competitiveness. You had to be careful about the opinions you uttered unless you were ready to back them up.

Crawford: Not very relaxed.

Pippin: There were exceptions. The fact is that I myself lived on shaky ground, and was inclined to feel that I had to prove myself.

Crawford: So New York was just right for you.

Pippin: I loved it. But wouldn't you know? After a few months of pleasant conviviality, my sterner side again took over. I was wasting time. I was not going to accomplish anything unless I returned to a more solitary existence. So I moved to a tiny, tiny room on the fourth floor. In the same building, but no longer a place where people would drift in. It was about the size of a ping-pong table, but it had a big window and even a little terrace, which gave an unlimited sense of space. And I really enjoyed the new isolation and the return to the writing that I had hoped to do.

Crawford: What were you writing?

Pippin: Oh, exploring. A journal, for one thing. Thoughts, impressions, notes for stories. But I was again barking up the wrong tree. If I had any talent for writing, I had not discovered where that talent lay.

Crawford: Did you love the theatre at that point?

Pippin: Very much so. As I had for a number of years.

Crawford: When did it start? I know that you go now to London on vacation for theatre.

Pippin: I can tell you exactly what moment the seed was planted. In the third grade I was taken to a marionette performance of *Hansel and Gretel* given by the seventh grade. To this day, I am flabbergasted by the quality of the marionettes and by the lively way in which they were handled. I remember them vividly. They were marvelously constructed. And in fact I must have been so visibly entranced that it was suggested I stand backstage at a second performance where I could watch the inner workings close at hand.

Crawford: So you were already an impresario in the third grade.

Pippin: [laughter] No, not an impresario; just a hopelessly enamored spectator. Sheer magic! For some time after that I tried to construct marionettes myself, but the only thing that my hands are good for is playing the piano.

Crawford: Where did they get the marionettes, that they should have such quality?

Pippin: They made them themselves--seventh graders! How they did it is a total mystery to me. That remained my single blissful experience of the theatre for some time to come. I didn't go to a real, professional performance of a play until 1940.

Crawford: When you were in your early teens, I guess.

Pippin: I quickly became star-struck, intrigued by the glamour of the theatre. And like most of my interests, I kept it secret.

Crawford: Why? Did you feel it wasn't proper? Something your family wouldn't have wanted?

Pippin: No, far from it. I suppose it was from a general deep-rooted fear of self-exposure--rather a paradox for someone whose ambition was to do precisely that as an artist, a term incidentally that I would have shied away from using.

Crawford: Your music had been so encouraged.

Pippin: Yes, it's hard to stay secret about playing the piano, often to my chagrin. I was always embarrassed when people found out. I especially did not want my schoolmates to know.

Crawford: Were your brother and sister involved in the arts?

Pippin: Not to my knowledge. But perhaps they were secretive, too. I'm very fond of both of them and we have much deeply in common, but I didn't find this out till years later.

Crawford: I think we left you in solitary confinement.

Pippin: Yes, back to my cell-like room in Greenwich Village. Undistracted, alone with my talent, I became increasingly doubtful as to whether it existed at all. So what was I to do?

Life sometimes turns up with surprising answers. It was the middle of summer, and I got a call to play for some ballet classes at a music camp on Cape Cod for three weeks--an unexpected turning point. I was now an old man of twenty, and here I was surrounded by kids--fourteen, fifteen, sixteen--all so active, so involved musically. There were some excellent pianists. I remember Lillian Kallir. Does the name--

Crawford: Yes, I know the name.

Pippin: At the time she was fourteen years old. So intelligent, so mature, so charming. I remember her playing the Mendelssohn *Variations Serieuses*. It must have been her Mendelssohn summer. She played the D Minor Trio, also the G Minor Concerto with the camp student orchestra, besides Bach, Beethoven and Chopin. This camp was the vision of my childhood finally realized.

To my surprise, I felt an intense craving to practice again, and I dived into it. I had to make up for five lost years.

When the three weeks were up, I went back to New York, but now convinced that I had found my vocation. In the fifty years that have followed, I have never seriously wavered, although the vocation has undergone a number of unexpected permutations. The intensity has remained.

I got a job at the School of American Ballet.

Crawford: Balanchine?

Pippin: Balanchine. I liked the atmosphere at the American school even better than Vilzak-Schollar, partly because of another fortunate encounter with a Russian émigré, also one of the greats of the pre-Revolutionary era. His name was Pierre Vladimiroff. Now Vladimiroff was generally considered mad. [laughter] He was indeed eccentric, and he had the reputation of being difficult to play for. There were about six pieces that he insisted upon over and over and over, and he seemed uneasy or distressed whenever a pianist tried to leave this too, too familiar terrain. I would start to play. "No, no, please! Beethoven Ecossaise!" Or, "No, no, no! Chopin Nocturne!"

Crawford: Did you know these pieces?

Pippin: Only too well. But I kept trying to expand the repertory. One day after a few weeks, he demonstrated a step. Unwilling to give up, I started to play an unfamiliar piece. A look of enlightenment came over his face. He came over and said solemnly, "From now on, you play what you want." And he kept to his word. If I made a mistake or played something that didn't quite fit, "No, no, no, I change! I change. Not you. I change!" [laughter]

Each class became a concert. These were professional classes and so, as at Vilzak-Schollar, they were frequented by some of the leading dancers of the day: Maria Tallchief, Andre



Eglevsky, Alexandra Danilova, the list goes on and on. I loved playing for Vladimiroff, but I could not say the same for Balanchine.

Crawford: Really? What were your impressions?

Pippin: Well, I respected him enormously, as did everyone else, but we were at crosspurposes. I liked Vladimiroff's classes because he wanted me to inspire the dancers with real music. Balanchine, on the other hand, simply wanted me to keep time. Why he didn't simply use a metronome instead of a pianist I don't know, because he wanted the music to be absolutely cut and dried, just the simplest, bare-bones beat. Naturally, I wouldn't dream of arguing with what he wanted, but it was not what I wanted to do. So I thoroughly disliked his classes--which in fact I seldom played--and after about a year and a half I was summarily fired.

Crawford: By Balanchine?

Pippin: Well, as a matter of fact, I was. He had a friend arriving from Europe who needed work and I was the most dispensable of the pianists, all the others being much older. So I was summoned and told that I used the pianos too much. Of course, they'd never told me to cut it out.

Crawford: You were practicing?

Pippin: Yes. You see, they had three different studios, and almost always one of the three studios would not be in use. So I would go into the unused studio between classes and practice. Again, they never complained about it until I was fired for doing so.

Crawford: They had to find something, didn't they?

Pippin: They also complained that I had turned down classes. Well, I had turned down classes only at the occasional request of another pianist who was eager for the money. As always, I was eager for free time. Again, no fuss had been made about it, but suddenly it was used as an excuse to fire me. With three days notice, incidentally. The other pianists were quick to rally to my side. They offered to go on strike, which I think would have been thoroughly justified.

Crawford: That's lovely.

Pippin: It *was* lovely, and it was much appreciated. But I had no desire to stay. I thought, "If they don't want me, that's that." So I was suddenly a freelancer in New York.

Crawford: Were you studying at the time?

Pippin: Very much so. As soon as I got back from the summer music camp I was lucky enough to find, through a friend's suggestion, an extraordinary teacher named Israel Citkowitz. Citkowitz was a rarity among so-called advanced teachers in recognizing that the secret of progress lies in probing at the roots, in going back to basics, in cultivating the elementals of playing. His own vocabulary was so precise and unpretentious, it's hard for me to do it justice.

Crawford: What was his approach like?

Pippin: His goal was the perfect, effortless rapport and interplay of hand and ear. He insisted that technique, rightly understood, was about 90 percent of the problem. Only when a person's technique is in good working order can natural musicality take over. In fact, that is the essence of technique: the unfettered ability to let one's musical feeling express itself. I've seen it so often with my own pupils. Whenever a pupil seemed to have not a jot of musicality, it was always bound up with poor coordination. As soon as the coordination, or technique, improved, instantly the music would blossom forth.

Of course, that's not the whole story. Music is a vast world that requires total immersion--a fact that Citkowitz did not minimize. But still the *sine qua non* is simply having the means to bring it about. The piano can be deceptive, because facility is easily mistaken for technique. I was always blessed with an abundance of facility. Control of it was another matter.

Crawford: Because you had paid little attention to technique?

Pippin: Well, because no rigid discipline had been imposed upon me, I played in a natural, easy, fluent way. This is the basis of good technique, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. Citkowitz worked with me most painstakingly on the application of very specific ideas--ideas that I have continued to feed on for the next fifty years. Fifty years of unending discovery. The goal of technique is to feel perfectly at home with the instrument, a rapport that is based on precision and economy. It could be compared to the cultivation required of a sport like tennis or golf. Or like ballet. All of them requiring total,

spontaneous physical coordination. The result, musical revelation.

Crawford: So this is where he wanted to start with you?

Pippin: And start he did. But I was not ready. I could not grasp the direction we were going. After a few weeks, I left him for another teacher whose concentration was quite on the other extreme. Lillian Bauer, herself a remarkable pianist, tended to be dismissive of technique. The all-important thing was to listen, to hear accurately, and to be sure that you were getting out of the piano exactly what you intended. Who could argue with that?

Having gone so long without a teacher, without an outside ear, this was a most necessary corrective, and so I made a lot of progress with her for a year and a half. But then I happened to run into Citkowitz by chance. I'd always had a vast respect for him and a regret that I had not understood better what he was aiming at. He invited me to come up and play for him--his studio was in Carnegie Hall. He was impressed by my improvement and asked if I might be interested in working with him again. I thought this would be just the time, so I stayed with him for the next two years. My education began!

Crawford: Could you elaborate on his approach?

Pippin: It's hard to do so away from the piano, and without actually working together and demonstrating. The words alone might seem dry and mechanical--heaven forbid! I'll have to give you a few lessons! Briefly, playing from the shoulder, the arm supporting every note, loose hands, firm fingertips, cultivating rebounds and reflexes, always resilient, never forcing, maximum efficiency with minimal effort, exploring the cross-fertilization, as it were, of the different kinds of touch: legato, non-legato, legatissimo, portamento, staccato and staccatissimo. But technique is something that one discovers through doing rather than through listening to explanations.

Crawford: It sounds like you were putting in many hours at the piano.

Pippin: Like a maniac. Until I got fired, I was putting in seven hours a day at the ballet school, mostly doing my own thing. At night, because I didn't have a piano in the tiny room where I lived, I would rent a piano studio on Broadway for an hour. Nobody noticed whether you stayed three hours, four hours, five hours. I would often stay until two in the morning.



Crawford: Did you ever sleep there?

Pippin: No, I never got quite that far. But the twelve- to fourteen-hour day has never been a problem with me. When I am absorbed, I don't like to stop. I always want to go further. Getting started is sometimes problematical. [laughter]

Crawford: When practicing, were you reading new things?

Pippin: No, I had spent too much time in the past doing just that, covering lots of ground superficially. Now I was bent on greater perfection. I worked on Chopin études, scherzi, ballades. Also on a good deal of Bach, Schubert, Brahms, Debussy--works that I had previously skimmed through.

Crawford: With the idea of performing them?

Pippin: By this time my ideas of the future had not solidified in any way. My motive was pure and simple: I wanted to see how far I could go in mastering the instrument and in becoming a rounded musician. I knew for certain that I wanted to dedicate my life passionately to something, and music was the most likely thing.

Crawford: You didn't want to be an accompanist?

Pippin: I did not scorn being an accompanist. In fact, I was earning--well, eking out a living by accompanying singers, mostly for lessons or for practice sessions. It was, believe me, a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence. I had few connections and no credentials.

By this time I did have a piano and was looking for a place to live where I could put it--no small challenge, though nothing like today. I wound up with a very odd living arrangement indeed. Going into a bookstore out of the rain one afternoon, I found myself standing beside an elderly woman who looked like a frightened, furtive animal that had crept out of the shadows and recesses of New York. She began talking, apparently to no one, and I gathered eventually that she was going on a trip around the world and was looking for a student to live in her three-room apartment while she was gone.

Well, my ears perked up. She said that she was a doctor, that she studied in the library on 42nd Street until ten o'clock every night, that she planned to be gone for an entire year, and was desperate to find a reliable person. I told her that I was a student with a piano, which she said would be no problem. The location was in Hell's Kitchen, on 54th Street, close to the river--bleak and squalid.

I moved in two days later, with piano, and soon started to practice, most cautiously and gingerly. Definitely a tenement, about ten families lived just beyond these walls, which were about the thickness of tissue paper. I could hear every word that transpired among them, which was no great feat because they were usually shrieking at each other. Nonetheless, I was leery about how they would receive my piano playing, and feared that disapproval would be expressed by a brick through the window.

Sure enough, after I'd practiced for about ten minutes, there came a loud, firm knock at the door and I thought, "Well, this is it." What it was was a man from the gas company come to turn off the gas for nonpayment. What a relief! I guess I paid the bill on the spot. And I never once heard a word of complaint from the neighbors.

I waited confidently and serenely for Dr. Sweet to start on her trip around the world. I waited and waited, until it dawned on me that the trip was a fiction, a way to get somebody to rent her dark and tiny third room--so tiny that it could not possibly accommodate an upright piano. But her own room did, so that was where the piano went.

Her room also had the light. A small kitchen separated the two rooms. True to her word, she was out every day until late. So I had the place to myself till ten-thirty at night, and practiced to my heart's content.

Crawford: She was a medical doctor?

Pippin: I doubt it. But there was no doubt that she was severely paranoid. She accused me of stealing from her. Stealing pancake flour, stealing her shoes, God knows what. She became convinced that the neighbors had somehow conspired to get me into the apartment so that I could kill her. She was in constant contact with the police, baffled that they were so unresponsive to her complaints. One drama after another! [laughter] Certainly a bizarre situation. You may wonder why I didn't move, but poverty doesn't leave open many options, particularly with a piano. Fortunately, I didn't have to see a great deal of her.

So despite the rich concert life and a few good friends, New York was not an appealing place to live under these circumstances. For one thing, throughout the cold winter the apartment was entirely without heat. But the summer of '50 brought a welcome breath of fresh air. Through a friend, I got a summer job on Nantucket as a bellboy in a rambling hotel

called The White Elephant. What a lovely summer! Did I say that I was never good at indolence? Huh! Away from New York heat and squalor, away from my own frantic drive. And leisure! The job itself was about as undemanding as a job can be, and the island was enchanting. Modest in its beauty, but utterly compelling.

Away from the piano and free from a self-imposed bondage, I was able to feel things out again, and somehow new possibilities seemed to sprout. Even writing was not out of the question. At the end of August, I came back to New York in a glow, ready to reconsider all possibilities. During my absence, Dr. Sweet had been taken away to a mental hospital. I went to see her a few times where she now claimed that I was her only friend. But it was delightful to have the place to myself, and with a little money saved up from the summer, I was in no hurry to take the next step. I waited until I was literally down to fifty cents.

Crawford: Before you went out looking for a job?

Pippin: It was high time! As I headed out, I ran into the mailman. My mail had been accumulating because I'd lost the key to the box. He opened it for me, and it was stuffed with mail. Instead of going out to look for a job, I went back upstairs to read my mail.

The mail included a letter from Ben Johnston, my dear high school friend. Ben was as interested in music as me, and infinitely more creative. He has gone on to write marvelous music. In his letter he said that he and his wife Betty were living on a ranch about a hundred miles north of San Francisco, on the coast, overlooking the ocean, a place called Gualala, where he was studying with Harry Partch.

Crawford: Oh, yes, I know about Partch.

Pippin: I'll go into that later. But Ben had come across a book by Harry Partch, explaining his theories on music and on the basic sounds of music. Ben, whose bent was scientific as well as musical, was fascinated.

This led to correspondence with Harry, who invited him out to study with him, and so now Ben was inviting me to join them, to live on the ranch as their guest, and to learn something of Partch's music. Well, I ask you! The choice between a ballet studio in grubby New York and a ranch on the coast of California! Not difficult.

Crawford: Was Harry Partch well known then?

Pippin: Not to me. I am sure that he was well known to a coterie, to a cult. He was always a cult hero, as he still is.

## II MOVING TO CALIFORNIA: 1951

*Ben Johnston and Harry Partch in Gualala; Settling in San Francisco and Performing at the hungry i, 1952; Enrico Banducci, Impresario of North Beach; Beer, Bach and Beethoven: Sunday Afternoons at the hungry i; Working and Studying Piano with Laura Nast and Living in a Loft in "Pacific Depths"; Creating and Performing Concerts at Opus One, 1952; Exploring Scientology; Leaving Opus One and a Partnership, 1957*

Crawford: How did you get to the west if you were down to fifty cents?

Pippin: I thought you might wonder--[laughter] I sold my piano. One of the singers I played for needed a piano, and since she was about as poor as I was, I sold the piano to her for the price of a bus ticket plus ten dollars. Quite a nest egg.

Crawford: Your life is so marked by these marvelous turns.

Pippin: Yes, I know.

Crawford: Had you kept in touch with Ben Johnston?

Pippin: No, and I have no idea how he found my address. We had been out of touch for several years, and we've been out of touch a good deal since then, when he and Betty left California, first for Illinois, then for North Carolina. But we met again just a few weeks ago. He was here in San Francisco to do a piece of Harry's with the Kronos Quartet. They have played several of his own quartets, but this time they were playing a piece by Harry that Ben had transcribed. You know that Harry wrote entirely for instruments of his own invention and construction.

Crawford: Yes, I have read about them.

Pippin: Harry was a masterful carpenter and craftsman as well as a composer, and these were fabulous instruments, but

unfortunately, because of their uniqueness, live performance of Harry's music is unlikely if not impossible. The original instruments may exist, but I'm not even sure if they are in one place. And who is going to learn to play them? Even if someone did--a group of people, rather--it would be difficult to transport the body of instruments into an auditorium. In fact, some of the instruments were actually built into the house where he lived.

Crawford: You probably know more about Harry Partch than anyone else.

Pippin: Ben knows incomparably more. My own contact with Harry was relatively brief. I had got my bus ticket. I got to San Francisco, where I stayed a couple of nights, by which time my ten dollars was sorely depleted. So I hitchhiked up the coast to Gualala, which turned out to be a general store which had closed up for the day. I understand that the area has been much developed since then. Ben and Betty had come down to meet the bus, expecting me to be on it, but I arrived an hour later, just as it was starting to get dark.

Behind the store there was a winding dirt road leading up to the ranch, up and up and up, surrounded by spectacular redwood trees and ferns as big as our Eastern trees. California at its most outrageous excess. [laughter] It had been a wet season, so from someplace down below one could hear rushing water. An hour later it would have been pitch dark.

As it was, I wasn't absolutely sure that I was on the right road, but there I was, pack on shoulder, walking uphill, and sure enough after half an hour or so there appeared a distant light on the far side of a clearing. I knocked on the door of a small house and to my vast relief Ben and Betty opened it. That was the start of three rapturous months in the most spectacularly beautiful place I had ever seen.

Ben, Betty and I lived in one house, and Harry lived about a hundred yards further down the road in a house that he had reconstructed himself. His carpentry skills were not confined to musical instruments.

So we were two families, so to speak: Ben, Betty and I, more or less of an age, with much in common, and Harry--of an older generation, slightly prickly, slightly cantankerous, who had forged a unique life and a unique art by fiercely and stubbornly going his own way.

Crawford: Was he alone?



Pippin: Yes, and before Ben and Betty's arrival he had lived for about seven years in these gorgeous surroundings, but in almost total isolation. By this time, he was becoming increasingly restless and moody. He wanted to get to the Bay Area. And Ben wanted to go to Mills College to study with Darius Milhaud.

Crawford: Was Ben composing then?

Pippin: Yes, although I think that he found his real voice as a composer later on, when the music that he created was truly wondrous, original, and captivating as well.

Crawford: Have you done some of his work?

Pippin: No, because unfortunately for me, Ben has written mostly in the microtonic idiom. He's written a few pieces for piano, but always for pianos that had to be specially tuned, which makes performance somewhat impractical. Like Harry, he's not a very practical composer.

Crawford: Good that you have kept in touch.

Pippin: He's someone I'm most grateful for. He lives with Betty, another person I'll always treasure, in North Carolina, ironically not far from where I was born.

On leaving the ranch, they both went to Mills, and I came to San Francisco. Harry got a houseboat in Sausalito, and I must say that I didn't see much of Harry after that. But I saw a lot of Ben and Betty, until they went back East. Ben got a teaching position at Champagne, the University of Illinois, where he stayed for a good many years, and eventually retired to North Carolina.

Crawford: Where had he gone after Richmond?

Pippin: He went to William and Mary College. He was in the navy for a while and played trombone in the navy band. Like most of us, he spent a few years trying to find the direction he wanted to go. This was provided by his discovery of Harry's music and his theories on music.

Crawford: Harry Partch constructed a scale with different intervals, hadn't he?

Pippin: Indeed. You know that the standard scale consists of twelve intervals that are not scientifically precise. Using the overtone sequence, it is a little bit off--an imperfection that Bach tried to reconcile in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Bach's



solution has been more or less followed ever since. But Harry discovered or invented a microtomic scale of forty-three tones to an octave, which means very, very tiny intervals indeed. One of his basic instruments, which he called the chromalodium, was a variant of an organ, and it was tuned to this microtomic scale.

Ben had an extraordinarily sensitive ear. He could tune any instrument to the chromalodium, while I would have been lucky to get within the ballpark. Harry also played the viola, on which of course you can get any sort of intervals that you're capable of producing. He had also created several plucked instruments, which were mostly what I played. I believe that all of these instruments were designed to follow the subtle spoken inflections of the human voice.

Crawford: You were there to interpret his music?

Pippin: Well, no. My function was not quite so elevated. It was just to play the notes, to follow instructions. In fact, I must admit that while I liked the music very much, what I did was purely mechanical, and this I did not particularly enjoy. There was certainly no call, no room for inspiration.

Playing the kathara, for example, consists of regulating a bar which controls the intonation, then giving a sweeping pluck across six strings, then relocating the bar, giving another pluck, and so on. It was not unlike operating a switch board. I also played the chromalodium, the organ-like instrument, which was a little bit more up my line.

But to enjoy playing an instrument, you have to be reasonably good at it. And of course I was a rank beginner. There was no piano in Harry's place. Harry scorned the piano, of course, with its "artificial" intonation. But there were three houses on the lot and one of them was not occupied. That's where the piano went. [laughter] And it's where I started spending time.

Crawford: You find pianos in the strangest places.

Pippin: I found something else as well--an old-fashioned organ pumped by pedals. For the most part, the organ is an instrument that I am not fond of. I'm mostly familiar with huge, gargantuan organs that seem to have the subtlety of a bulldozer, without the definition. I've heard some recordings of Baroque organs that are delightful, but these big modern behemoths I just don't care for. However, during those months on the ranch, I loved playing this particular organ. It gave such a new slant

on the Bach preludes and fugues, which lend themselves to so many modes of realization.

Crawford: Full keyboard?

Pippin: No less. And such a variety of colors--the *cor anglais*, the *vox humana*, the oboe *d'amore*, et cetera. All in all, I was blissfully happy and could have stayed up there in the clouds indefinitely, but after about three months, for various reasons, Harry wanted to get back to the Bay Area, Ben wanted to get to Mills, so I came here and here I am.

Crawford: And here we are. Do you think we should end it here and start with that next time?

Pippin: It does sound like the beginning of a new chapter.

[Interview 2: November 27, 1996] ##

Crawford: Where did I leave you last time?

Pippin: I was just reaching my fourth birthday, I believe. [laughter]

Crawford: Well, then, let's bring you to California, to this part of California.

Pippin: I was twenty-five at this point, and my life was again a blank slate waiting to be written on. In leaving New York, I was convinced that I had relinquished any idea of becoming a performing musician. Now this is, I might add, a typically New York notion. [laughter] To my provincial mind it was clear that any musical career emanated from New York. New York was the central spoke of the wheel. There's some truth in that, especially for singers, many of whom do leave here to go to New York, hoping for a career, and some do find it.

But in reversing the direction, I'd left that possibility behind me, and had little idea of what to replace it with. I thought vaguely of someday settling down as a teacher, not necessarily of music.

In this era of the Korean war, one could be fairly nonchalant about earning a living. Labor was in short supply and menial jobs at any rate were easily come by. And sure enough, the very day after I arrived I got a job as a busboy in Moors cafeteria--a very nice one, incidentally, on Powell Street near Market. It's since been demolished, but one of its crowning features was a huge mosaic by Bufano, for which he was

given free food for life. Really a most elegant cafeteria.  
[laughter]

I had little material ambition or concern, a frame of mind that was more typical of the sixties rather than the fifties. A pioneer of the "me generation," I was interested in self-exploration, in Jungian psychology and Zen Buddhism, in meditation, things of that sort. In retrospect, it's easy to be condescending, but basically it was a search for honesty and truth.

Crawford: When did those interests begin?

Pippin: To some extent during the lonely days in New York. In fact, it was one of my reasons for leaving New York, which seemed so hostile to the kind of contemplative life that I envisioned. My first months in San Francisco I was overjoyed just to be here. The air was so fresh. The flowers were blooming.

At the same time, I felt perhaps a slight sense of anticlimax, too. There's a kind of poetry in the ugliness, in the stark contrasts of New York that still spoke to my Dostoyevskian side. San Francisco, in contrast, seemed almost too easy, too ordered, too agreeable. I would probably have a similar reaction if, through some unlikely twist of fate, I were to wind up in heaven. But on the whole I was very happy to take things as they came and I was not concerned about the future.

After a few months, the old restlessness returned. The job at Moors was entirely too much of a drain on my precious time and energy. In those days, as I said, work was easily come by, and Moors was part of a chain of Foster's cafeterias--I think there were about twenty of them in the city. By phoning in the morning, one could almost always get work for the day.

Crawford: You had the right credentials.

Pippin: Well, no, they would have taken almost anybody. I found that I could live on two days a week's work. Rents were low--thirty-five, forty dollars a month--and working in the cafeteria, you'd get a couple of meals. But eventually I got what seemed the ideal job I'd been looking for, three hours a day, four days a week. The cafeteria on the eleventh floor of I. Magnin. Perfect!

Crawford: You were free.

Pippin: Yes, the freedom was what counted. And thanks to a lucky accident--which I must say has been typical of my life here--I had met somebody who lent me a piano. He had bought the piano for himself, but found, like so many people, he really wasn't playing it, and he wanted somebody to use it. So he gave it to me as a long-time loan.

Crawford: Who was he?

Pippin: He was a doctor and his name was Ed Bartlett. He let me keep the piano for several years, as a matter of fact. I was happy to be practicing again, without any particular goal in mind, but for the best of all reasons: I enjoyed doing it.

Then one decisive night, probably the biggest turning point of my entire life, a friend took me to a charming cabaret called the hungry i. Now the hungry i had very recently been taken over by Enrico Banducci, an expansive and gregarious Italian who was a singer and who played the violin and who loved classical music and who later became an extremely well-known icon of San Francisco.

This was a midweek night, it was late, nobody else was there, and my friend and Enrico both prevailed on me to play the piano. Oh, yes! Enrico had just acquired a good piano and wanted to hear how it sounded. I had always been bashful about impromptu performing, however informal, but Enrico is a person hard to say no to. I played for half an hour or so. Enrico was overwhelmingly friendly and flattering (a weapon that can slay me every time) and right away asked me if I would be interested in coming back for five nights a week to play. He stressed that I was to play as little or as much as I wanted to, play whatever I wanted to, with no obligation to play requests.

Crawford: Why was that?

Pippin: Both of us knew that classical piano requests can usually be counted on the fingers of one hand, and neither of us wanted to hear the four or five warhorses over and over again.

I pondered his offer. I knew very well that if I said yes, I would take it seriously, which would mean practicing all day. It would mean dropping my wonderful three-hour job, and who knows how long my appeal would last? So I pondered--for about five minutes! After all, this was a step in the direction that I still wanted to go, and it was an adventure.

Crawford: What was the atmosphere of the hungry i like?

Pippin: Sheer magic! It was downstairs. The entrance looked like the entrance to a Paris Metro stop, with a wide flight of stairs that opened up into a charming room, odd-shaped but intimate, with a few large abstract designs on the walls. Directors' chairs were placed around low, small tables where people gathered around lighted candles. European was the adjective people always used to describe it. In the warm glow, it was not hard to imagine oneself in Paris or the dream city of one's choice.

Enrico was absolutely true to his word. I was never pressured to do anything other than what he had stipulated. That is, I was to play what I wanted. And what I wanted to do was to play the greatest music ever written, and to get people to listen to a Beethoven sonata or a Bach suite, for example, under these informal circumstances. It seemed to me that this could be an ideal way to share music, both for the performer and for the listener. And suddenly the career that I thought I'd abandoned seemed to reflower in a way that I had never expected. At any rate, that was my hope.

The hope was sometimes confirmed by the reaction of audiences that were friendly, attentive and responsive. But I must admit that more often it was a tug of war. People in a bar are so used to listening to the piano as a fairly neutral background.

Crawford: And so they would talk.

Pippin: Indeed. I never knew when starting out to play a serious piece what was going to happen by the end of it. Enrico did what he could to convey the message that silence was expected, but how far can you go in policing a cabaret? Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. Nonetheless, my five nights a week continued for several months, and then I had an altercation with the Musicians' Union.

It seems that I had briefly joined the union way back in New York five years earlier, and this was, I suppose, like an early marriage that's conveniently forgotten. [laughter] I had joined the union because I had been promised a job. I was accepted into the union after giving a satisfactory rendition of "Happy Birthday To You." The job never materialized, so I never so much as paid dues to the union. I just ignored it completely, no doubt assuming that it would simply go away.

Far from it! The union got on my case and made a big fuss about it. I was hauled in for a hearing, and thanks to Enrico, a prominent judge, Judge Meekle, showed up to appeal on my



behalf. Awestruck by my eminent advocate, whom I had never met before, they decided to punish me lightly, by cutting my work nights down from five to two.

Crawford: You mean to say that you can't let a union membership lapse?

Pippin: I think the idea was that I was playing in what should have been a union job and that I was not declaring it to the union. Enrico was paying me eight dollars a night, which I thought was a sumptuous wage, but when I was allowed back to the job, my salary was raised to eighteen dollars a night.

Crawford: Union scale.

Pippin: I thought it quite exorbitant. At the time, I found the union most intimidating. Basically, I was opposed to it. I was all for labor, but how do you unionize art? I later changed my mind. For one thing, the union became more flexible, less threatening. Over the course of a long career, they have been most cooperative, most understanding.

Crawford: Thanks to Jerry Spain?

Pippin: I give him much of the credit for changing the character of the union. I certainly regarded him as a friend, an ally. And I came to recognize that without the Musicians' Union, quite simply, music would cease to be professional. It would be confined to amateurs and to fanatics like myself.

Back to the pre-Spain days. Being cut down to two nights a week was not entirely unwelcome. It allowed more time to prepare. I tried to make every performance up to concert level, and for that, you can never prepare enough. Furthermore, some people came to hear me almost every night that I played, so I had to keep them interested by constantly varying the repertory.

So I was practicing at least eight hours a day. For several months I was learning a new piece every day, all of which I performed by memory. This capacity has diminished radically with age, but in those days I memorized rapidly. Often I would work on a new piece all day and perform it by heart that night. By a piece, I would count, say, a movement of a sonata. A sonata would count as three or four pieces.

Crawford: Did you go through the whole Beethoven canon?

Pippin: Not quite. There are a few of the sonatas that I'm still not that crazy about. But I've played twenty-six of the thirty-two.

Crawford: Do you have them in your hands?

Pippin: They don't stay. This is usually true of things that you learn quickly. On the other hand, even the things that you gulp down quickly at that age stay with you better than the things that you learn at a far more painstaking rate later on.

But while I was slaving away, the hungry i was undergoing a transformation. It was becoming hugely successful. I had started in November of '51. By the end of '52, the i had been discovered. Enrico had a real eye for talent, and several of the people that he brought in were enormously popular--Mort Sahl, Stan Wilson, Jory Remus. Later on, people that went on to extraordinary fame, like Woody Allen and Barbra Streisand. The list goes on and on. I became the sore thumb. I still had my two nights, but people would come to my nights expecting to hear Mort Sahl or Stan Wilson. You can guess their reaction. And so I was eventually let go.

Crawford: By Banducci?

Pippin: Yes, but he didn't cut me loose altogether. He suggested that they might be able to use me at The Purple Onion, a not too dissimilar place across the street. We tried this briefly, but I was sandwiched in between more popular entertainers, and was expected to play only short, flashy pieces, which was not at all what I had set out to do. And so it really seemed that things had come to an end.

It was here, incidentally, that I made a decidedly unpromising debut as a narrator, a role that later on was to become so pivotal. I thought it might help focus audience attention, or at least convey the idea that they were expected to listen if I said a few words about the piece I was going to play. My remarks were going to be brief and to the point. But I had barely started when someone in the audience was distinctly heard to say, "Why doesn't he shut up and just play?" I took this advice for a good many years.

As I said, it looked like the end, but chance again entered the picture. I had a conversation with Irma Kay, who was nursing her own vision of starting a musical comedy company on a semi-amateur basis. She was a gifted director and a gifted entrepreneur, and she was confident that she could bring it off and make a popular success of it. Sure enough, a few months



later she acquired a place in much need of renovation on South Van Ness and called it The Opera Ring, where she indeed realized her dream and kept it going for a good many years.

To me, she suggested that Sunday afternoon concerts in a cabaret would be appealing. I leapt to the idea. Thinking it over, the plan took shape. Each program would be in three parts. I would play parts one and three solo, and in the middle I would be joined by a guest--a violinist, a cellist, a clarinetist, a singer, whatever. This would add scope, an extra dimension, an infinite range of possibilities.

I approached Enrico with the idea and he was all in favor of it. Let me point out, this meant many extra hours of work for him, and I'm sure he was already taxed to the limit. Irma had not yet opened the Opera Ring or she might have suggested that we do the concerts there. Enrico never mentioned the extra work, on a Sunday afternoon following a heavy weekend. And furthermore, he volunteered to provide a buffet--a wonderfully generous gesture. Well, I seemed to judge that everybody was living on an income comparable to my own, so I set the admission charge at forty cents, for concert and buffet. I got to keep the door take, from which I paid the weekly guest.

Friends helped me with a mailing list and, by George, the concerts started with a bang. Nobody was more surprised than I. Borrowing a line from Charlie Chaplin's movie *Limelight* we called them "The Beer, Bach and Beethoven Concerts." [laughter] Later we changed it to the more sedate title, The Four O'Clock Concerts. And they continued to be successful. The weekly guest artists would draw in a number of people, and there were a good many regulars, so the room was packed every week. This was indeed the goal that I had envisioned more than a year earlier.

Crawford: How many people could the hungry i seat?

Pippin: With rooms of that sort it's always somewhat flexible. The room looked and felt pretty full with fifty people, but it could accommodate a hundred, or even more. The utmost that I could expect in terms of income would be about forty dollars. More usually it was closer to thirty, from which I paid my guest fifteen.

Crawford: And who were your soloists?

Pippin: At first I didn't know many musicians in the area, so my selection was chancy, based entirely on other people's

suggestions and recommendations. Later on I became more knowledgeable about whom I could call on, but that first spring, the soloists were of uneven quality. Nonetheless, I think that the programs were always interesting.

But come Memorial Day, I suddenly faced severe competition -- lovely springtime weather. With long afternoons, it was not so easy to entice people into a dark basement on a sunny Sunday. Attendance dropped precipitously, but by this time I was ready for a break. I'd been going strenuously, relentlessly for a long time, and something else was looming.

During the previous summer, among the people that came to hear me was Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Summer Pops at the Civic Auditorium. More accurately, he had been brought to hear me by Joe Dyer, who was head of the city arts commission. And Fiedler came. I must say, it was one of my good nights. The room was packed, and the audience was quiet, attentive and enthusiastic. It was one of the nights that worked the way I had always hoped, and Fiedler was evidently impressed. I was engaged on the spot to play the Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* the following summer.

Crawford: Here, with the Pops?

Pippin: Yes, and the time was getting close. The performance was set for early August, and here it was the middle of June and I had not even started learning the Rhapsody. Now, this is insane. Looking back, I can still get cold shudders. This is the recurrent nightmare of any performer: you're unprepared but you've still got a week to get ready, then a single day, then you're on the way to the auditorium, and you've still not had time to look at the music. [laughter]

Well, as I said, it's a recurrent dream--a theme with variations. And now it was actually happening! The dream was coming all too horribly true. So you can understand why I was eager for some free weeks in which to concentrate entirely on the Rachmaninoff.

Crawford: And you knew you could do it.

Pippin: Listen, there's nothing like ignorance. Ignorance is invaluable, irreplaceable. Yes, I was just stupid and ignorant enough to think I could. And so I did.

Luck came again to my rescue. A friend suggested that I call Laura Nast, who was scheduled to play the Dohnanyi *Variations on a Nursery Rhyme* a week before I was to play the

Rachmaninoff. My friend thought that Laura might welcome our getting together, so that I could play the orchestral accompaniment for her on a second piano and she could do the same for me. So Laura and I got together, in fact many times. Without this, God only knows what would have happened. My nightmare would truly have become a reality.

In addition to providing me with the absolutely essential practice, Laura was a fabulous teacher. She was only a few years older than me, but she was far, far better trained as a musician. I've told you about Citkowitz, my much revered teacher in New York, but his teaching had concentrated almost exclusively on the act of playing, not the music. My musical training had been haphazard and sparse.

Laura took me in hand, opening my mind and ears to a new world. Our sessions typically meant first going over the Dohnanyi, which she had polished to a fare-thee-well. This took about thirty minutes. The next four hours were spent working out the Rachmaninoff, variation by variation, getting it into ice-cold rhythmical shape. As a result of her meticulous coaching, the performance was a great success and the reviews were glowing. In all candor, I personally thought that my performance was wretched. It was an experience I would never want to repeat.

Crawford: How so?

Pippin: Well, I knew from listening to other pianists that the sound of the piano in that cavernous space tended to be swallowed up by the orchestra. I came prepared to play *loud*. To my astonishment, far from overpowered, I could barely hear the orchestra at all. A bassoon over here, a horn over there, no cohesive sound whatever, almost as if they were simply tuning up in another room. Whereas the piano seemed to be at glass shattering volume, the bull in the china shop. I knew that this was deceptive, that I had to fight constantly not to succumb to what I was actually hearing. There was no sense of interplay with the orchestra, no sense of making music *together*. Just blindly charging ahead through the dark. At the end I felt that I had emerged from a tunnel.

Crawford: Would that have been Frankenstein reviewing?

Pippin: No, it was R. H. Hagen, who normally was an excellent critic; also Alexander Fried in the *Examiner*, and a critic for the *Call-Bulletin*. All three of them were enthusiastic, and they all three made much of my colorful background and the fact that Fiedler had discovered me in a North Beach bistro, triumph

emerging out of obscurity, et cetera. I was happy that I had gotten away with it undetected.

Well, the result of this "triumph," the one that truly mattered, was that it virtually insured the continuance of the Four O'Clock Concerts at the hungry i, which I resumed a few weeks later. By this time I knew more about whom I could call on as outstanding soloists--sometimes members of the San Francisco Symphony, but more often from the members of a fine professional group known as the Little Symphony of San Francisco, conducted by Gregory Millar, who was also a fine singer. With first-rate soloists, the concerts were now certainly on a higher level.

Crawford: And there was nothing like them, I'm sure.

Pippin: Perhaps not. Oh, yes, I'd taken the bold, bold step of raising the admission price to seventy-five cents. [laughter] An almost hundred percent increase. I ask you, how daring can you get? I feel deeply indebted to Laura Nast, who later used her married name, Nicolaisen. She had helped me so much with the Rachmaninoff that I wanted to continue working with her. The task ahead of preparing a brand new program each week required all the help I could get.

Laura was characteristically enthusiastic and suggested that I come to her house on Wednesdays. That would give me two days to prepare the new program to play for her and then three days to work on it after the lesson, so that by Sunday, with luck, it would be presentable. Incidentally, each lesson lasted about ten hours, for which she was paid five dollars, only because I insisted on paying her *something*.

Crawford: You weren't working in the cafeterias anymore?

Pippin: No, I'd stopped that the day I started playing at the hungry i.

This was possible only because of another stroke of almost miraculously good luck. I had found the perfect place to live --a loft over a potato and onion warehouse in the former produce district. It has now become part of the Golden Gate redevelopment, a very swanky area. In those days, it was considerably less posh. At the foot of Pacific Avenue, we referred to it as Pacific Depths. [laughter]

This loft had been discovered and inhabited by skillful and creative people several years before I came along. They had fixed it up with much imagination. Two kitchens, two bathrooms, any number of large separate rooms, and also a good

deal of extra unused space where a handy person could even build his own living quarters.

Crawford: An ideal place for a colony of artists.

Pippin: Indeed it was. Now the total rent, divided between about ten people, was one hundred dollars a month. The space could have easily accommodated more than ten, but we wanted to maintain a degree of privacy.

Crawford: Was there some socializing?

Pippin: Oh, absolutely! They became very much my family, but more of that later. Oh, dear, we may not reach my sixth birthday!  
[laughter]

Crawford: We're not in any rush. We don't want to miss a detail!

Pippin: The loft, as I said, was nicely fixed up, but it was sparsely furnished. Each person had to provide his own furnishings, of which I had none, not even a mattress. I slept on the floor with a sleeping bag. Buying a mattress a year later was a great event. I could afford the luxury on account of a well-attended all-Chopin recital.

Crawford: You couldn't have had a piano up there.

Pippin: Oh, but I did! This was a necessity. No, I would never have moved into the loft if I could not have taken the piano. One of the great advantages of the loft was that it enabled me to practice at all hours, which was exactly what I did. Naively, I had the holy mission complex: this is what I am put on this earth to do. And people knew when they moved in that they would have to put up with my incessant practicing. And they did. They did. [laughs]

Crawford: Were they all artists?

Pippin: In a broad sense. Students of life, certainly. But they respected my dedication and they realized that if I was going to do what I was doing, this was the way I had to do it. Perhaps I should say they respected my right to believe this. So let's see, where were we?

Crawford: We're in the loft.

Pippin: Yes. The existence of such places, rare even then, was one of the things that made it easier, that made it *possible* to be an artist in those days. One could live with almost no money,



though there were weeks when I lived almost entirely on baked potatoes and Brussels sprouts.

Crawford: But you didn't suffer.

Pippin: I did not. One reads about the oppressiveness of poverty. But with lots going on, poverty can seem irrelevant. Of course, I had no financial responsibilities to other people. I was not bringing up a family. My situation was anything but hopeless. Though I was certainly dead poor, I never felt destitute. Yet I was never quite free of the weekly anxiety: what if no one shows up for the concert next Sunday? It kept one on edge. And one week it actually happened!

This was a few years later, on a rainy winter night. Embarrassingly, it was a solo recital. Worse yet, it was the first of a series of four.

Crawford: What did you do?

Pippin: Oh, I played the program! It was what I had come there to do. There is something oddly reassuring about reaching a point where you can't go any lower. I must have played quite well, because the next three were well attended. The gods were listening.

Crawford: Doing what you want to do is such a luxury, we think. Did it seem so then?

Pippin: The greatest luxury in the world. I was fully cognizant of that, and would not have traded it for anything else in the world.

So the Sunday concerts continued throughout the winter, and the hungry i continued to flourish. So much so that when spring came, the hungry i moved to bigger quarters just a block away, on Jackson near Columbus. This was the month of May, '54. I moved with them and continued the concerts there for several weeks. Maya Angelou was one of the featured artists in the evenings. She sang and danced, privately claiming that she was no singer and could no longer dance. Whether this was true or not, she was captivating both as a performer and as a person.

Little did I know it, but the next chapter in my life was about to begin. After moving out of the charming basement where it all got started, the hungry i discovered that they were stuck with a four-year lease on the space they had vacated. It so happened that I had a friend named Win Aston

who had been attending the Sunday concerts regularly for several months and had volunteered his services to help out with things like ushering and whatever was needed. He had recently become unemployed.

He suggested that we take over the vacated room and start a new place with a new concept. I approached Enrico. He gave us the okay and seemed relieved to have it off his hands.

At the time, hi-fi was something of a novelty. It was Win's idea that we install hi-fi equipment and play classical records. I believe it was my idea to have live concerts every night, in addition. I was hoping to go further yet--besides the concerts, to create a place for public discourse--speakers, readings, coordinated conversations on art, literature, politics, subjects of general interest. The room was small enough to become an interactive forum. We would perhaps have three live concerts a week, and the rest of the time would be devoted to programs of broader interest. And when there was nothing live, we would play records. Well, I was much taken with the idea. Looking back forty-five years later, I can't help feeling that life does slow down somewhat. [laughter]

Crawford: It doesn't seem so.

Pippin: I don't go out much now, and have little idea of what the nightlife of the city is like. But at that time, nightlife was ebullient, and North Beach was the center of it. There were many places of interest, and people tended to make a night of it, hopping from one barroom to another--from the hungry i to The Purple Onion, from Vesuvio's to The Black Cat. Conversation flourished and interest in classical music was rampant. It was this lively carnival atmosphere of people out exploring that spilled over into our new venture.

But what to name the place? Win, bless him, said, "We've got to wait until the right name pops up." And so we waited namelessly. We waited and waited, and one night somebody casually said "Opus One." Our eyes lit up.

Crawford: You knew.

Pippin: That was it. The name suggested a beginning. It suggested innovation. It also suggested that more would follow.

I must confess that the plans were soon revised and scaled down to a more modest level. I soon realized that if we were going to have a program on topics of interest, it would have to



be handled by someone other than myself. We settled for three live concerts a week--not a small undertaking.

Crawford: You played the programs?

Pippin: Two nights I played solo for somewhat over an hour. The third was a Sunday Night Concert involving other people, in which I sometimes participated and sometimes did not, though I always did the planning. These chamber music concerts were on a fairly small scale, a lot of duo recitals--cello and piano, piano four-hands, flute and piano, what have you. But we also ventured into trios and quartets for various instrumental combinations.

There was one onerous restriction: we were not allowed to include vocal music, as we had no entertainment license. The mysterious law of the land had decreed that instrumental music did not qualify as entertainment, but if you opened your mouth to sing, you were an entertainer.

Crawford: Was that a union rule?

Pippin: I'm not sure. Just an ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] licensing law, I think. In later years we would have probably overlooked the law and just gone ahead and taken our chances, assuming that an evening of Schubert *Lieder* would not bring the law crashing down on our heads. But there were several anxious people involved who said, "Oh, no, no, no, you mustn't risk it." So we didn't, much to my regret.

One of our first concerts presented Harry Partch--Harry grumbling, as usual. [laughter] "How can I give a concert? I can't bring my instruments down. All I can bring is some records." I said, "That's quite enough. People have so little chance to hear your music." So Harry consented to do two performances, both of which were packed to the gills, despite the unprecedented dollar admission charge--all of which went to Harry. He definitely had an enthusiastic following, and of course, deservedly so. He spoke and he played records, and because he was an excellent speaker and an arresting presence, not to mention the rare opportunity to hear his music, I'm sure that his audience was well satisfied. The truth is that if his music is to be heard at all, that's the way it's got to be--through recordings.

Crawford: And people would come to hear recordings.

Pippin: Yes. But Harry was not pleased. Despite the warm response, he tended to feel exploited, misunderstood and neglected. He was

an angry man. One sometimes felt that he was hostile to the music of all dead composers, and thus resentful and contemptuous of those who wanted to keep their music alive.

The great Odetta gave a couple of programs. This was before we realized that we were breaking the law in presenting a singer. Her voice at the time was likened to three trombones in unison. [laughter]

My two solo programs--actually one program given twice--was divided into two halves. Every week I would change one half of the program, so that essentially I was learning a new program every other week. And all by memory. A grueling schedule, but I had to keep the regulars happy. As you can imagine, I was more than willing to let other pianists share in the Sunday night programs.

Meanwhile, a new discovery was about to open up a new era. Now you will notice that I have mentioned a number of discoveries, none of which originated with me. Nor did this one. Lloyd Gowan, who played flute and piccolo in the San Francisco Symphony, casually suggested that we do a program for flute, oboe, cello and harpsichord. He told me that there was a wealth of music for this combination, and that it would make a delightful and unusual program. This was literally my introduction to Baroque chamber music.

Baroque music became tremendously popular, not to say ubiquitous, ten or fifteen years later, but in '54 I think that the vast musical public was as unaware of it as I was. The repertory for small ensembles is enormous, music by Telemann, Vivaldi, Marcello, Rameau and a host of others, not to mention Bach and Handel. Much of the music is of extremely high quality and of a style that might have been made to order for an intimate place like Opus One. The character of the music tends to be buoyant, animated and exuberant, with contrasting slow movements of melting lyricism. In short, music of enormous appeal, as the next decade was to demonstrate.

From that point onward, we gave a Baroque concert about once a month for almost every conceivable combination of instruments, and at every concert we had to turn people away. We could have done Baroque concerts every week, but I did not want Opus One to be a place exclusively identified with Baroque music, crowding out everything else. Nonetheless, we were.

Crawford: Identified with Baroque music?

Pippin: For decades afterward, "Oh, yes, I hear that you do Baroque music" was the standard comment.

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Pippin: But now let me tell you of the idea that I came up with all on my own. Yes, I actually came up with an idea. Crisis loomed. Suddenly, I don't remember why, in order to continue doing what we were doing, we were required to serve hot food. I suggested that we serve oatmeal.

Crawford: Oh, no, I can't believe that!

Pippin: So if somebody, possibly from the Alcoholic Beverage Control, came in demanding something hot, "Oh, yes, we have the most delicious oatmeal!" [laughter]

Crawford: Of course, that increased your clientele immeasurably.

Pippin: Well, I don't know how many orders we got for oatmeal, but for several years a box of Quaker oats remained on the back shelf and we could sit back complacently as law-abiding citizens.

Crawford: Could one order a drink?

Pippin: Oh, yes, people did drink beer and wine during the concerts, but they were served only during the intermission, not while the music was playing.

Crawford: So this wasn't like the hungry i?

Pippin: On the contrary, the hungry i maintained the same policy during the concerts. But no oatmeal.

Crawford: Oh, that's ingenious! This was your idea.

Pippin: That was my idea, yes. That one I claim credit for. [laughter] Going back a bit, I want to tell you more about Laura Nicolaisen. I went to her every week by bus, arriving at her home in Brisbane by noon.

The lessons lasted invariably until ten o'clock, and during that time she would take fifteen minutes off, while still listening, to slap dinner on the stove. It would be consumed in fifteen more minutes, then back to the piano. Her poor husband!

Crawford: Oh, marvelous!

Pippin: An inexhaustible fountain of insight and encouragement. And she would have given this for nothing, instead of for the five dollars that I insisted on paying her, presumably for one hour.

Crawford: That's remarkable. What happened to her? I never heard her play.

Pippin: She died prematurely of cancer in 1980. She had terrible struggles, a multitude of health problems in the last ten, fifteen years of her life, but she continued to play and gave a number of recitals at Opus One and later on at the Old Spaghetti Factory. A remarkable pianist, but because she had less patience with herself than she had with other people, she was an even more remarkable teacher. She continued teaching, incidentally, until three days before her death.

I stopped taking lessons with her after about a year, for various reasons. But we continued to see each other, and gave a number of four-hand programs together, where she was again the teacher.

Crawford: Was four-hand music popular then?

Pippin: We liked to do it at Opus One partly because it was popular nowhere else. It doesn't seem to fit the normal concert format. There are a few duo-piano teams that, as the name implies, play music for two pianos. But there is a far richer treasure of music for four hands at one piano, and this is seldom heard. Music by Mozart, Schubert, Dvorak, Brahms, Bizet, Debussy, and many others. Music peculiarly suited to Opus One--a cross between a living room and a concert hall.

Crawford: How did you advertise the concerts?

Pippin: The newspapers gave us a free listing every week, and we did put out fliers, but we had no publicity budget, and certainly no publicity machine. And no newspaper reviews. Nonetheless, we got good audiences. In retrospect, it seems amazing. My solo recitals, two a week, continued for nearly three years.

Crawford: How you could do this!

Pippin: Believe me, I was a zombie most of the time, going around in a trance.

Crawford: Do you have a list of what you performed? You must have run through nearly the whole repertoire.

Pippin: Well, the piano repertoire is enormous, far beyond the scope of any single person. But I am still amazed that the level of interest held up for so long.

Crawford: It had to be of very high quality.

Pippin: Well, certainly as high as I was capable of. But in playing so much and under such constant pressure, I was never, never adequately prepared. Yet I almost always played better than I had a right to expect. It was easy to get into the music because I never got out of it.

Crawford: Never got stale?

Pippin: Anything but. In later years, when I'm playing far, far less in public, I have plenty of time to polish and perfect, and yet my rare performances are almost always a disappointment. They fall short of what I can actually do. I like to think that these disappointing performances are still an improvement over the half-baked early performances that went so well. But who knows?

Crawford: Perhaps they were more spontaneous back then.

Pippin: I hope that what they lacked in polish was compensated for by the intensity of the moment, by sheer involvement. And when you perform so *much* you do become relatively fearless.

Crawford: Do you have any recordings?

Pippin: Thank God, no. I suspect that a recording would bring bitter disillusion. I like to think that some of these performances were inspired. So let's leave it at that.

Crawford: Okay, we'll leave it there.

Pippin: Well, this came to an abrupt end. [laughter]

Crawford: And no doubt serendipitously.

Pippin: No doubt. Though it didn't seem so at the time. It came to an end when I cut my thumb. I cut it quite badly opening a tin can, and ripped a nerve. I still feel tingles, forty-some years later. My right hand was put in a cast, where it stayed for several months. Maybe I just wanted a vacation.  
[laughter]

The next episode I speak of with some ambivalence. I became involved with Scientology.



A lady named Audrey had come to town, a matronly, good-natured, down to earth, wise woman, and a true believer. Win was instantly taken with her, and put himself in her hands. She was quite willing to take over. He had been having problems, mostly because of alcohol.

Crawford: Was he a musician, or just someone who loved--

Pippin: No, not a musician. But he was very responsive to music, and in a fairly short space of time--can one say that?--he had become very knowledgeable. He had a sure instinct, a sure taste, a fine feeling for music, and felt frustrated that he could express his love for music only by listening, rather than by doing.

He also had a wild side with wide emotional swings, exacerbated by drinking. Audrey took him in hand and the drinking problem ceased almost immediately. This considerably ratcheted up my interest in Scientology. Audrey started giving informal classes to a small group of recruits--an introduction that consisted mostly of wholesome common sense about responsibility and taking control of one's own life. Summer was coming on. Win, full of enthusiasm, had decided to go to Washington, D.C., to study Scientology. I was out of commission, on a forced vacation from the piano, so I decided to go as well.

Crawford: The doors of Opus One were closed?

Pippin: Not at all. Let me backtrack a bit. Win had many strong points, but financial management was not one of them. Although the Opus had done quite well even from the beginning and had taken in lots of money, the money was even more freely spent. Nobody knew exactly how, because the bookkeeping was chaotic. Within a year, we were deeply in debt and bankruptcy appeared imminent.

To his credit, Win realized that things could not continue under his own erratic management, so by his own initiative, he brought in a third person to take charge--Lenwood Payne was his name. Len was the ideal person for the job--intelligent, calm, quiet, but firm. He put Win under a strict allowance and within another year the debts were under control and we were even in a position where Win and I could go off for the summer. Till then I had drawn no money whatever from the Opus. I was paid the same rate as other musicians for performing two or three times a week, and that was it.



I left for Washington expecting some disability insurance money which failed to materialize. Win was drawing a weekly check from the Opus. Now the disturbing fact, which I learned a good deal later, was that Len was also sending money to me and I never got it.

Crawford: What happened?

Pippin: I presume that a check was sent to Win with the stipulation that part of it was for me. Perhaps this was not stated clearly enough.

Crawford: Or perhaps Win heard you say, "I don't need money."

Pippin: Oh, dear! How words can come back to haunt you! But you may have hit the nail on the head. "If Donald is so careless as to come to Washington without carefully providing, he must be taught a lesson. It would be a disservice to come to his rescue." Tough love indeed!

Crawford: Let's look at it charitably.

Pippin: Oh, let us do that. Except that things happened later on that made me regard Win with considerably less charity. For the moment, we were both much preoccupied with Scientology.

Crawford: Washington was the center?

Pippin: It was at that time. Let me add that I was much drawn to it, despite an initial prejudice. It did not change any of my basic beliefs, but it did reinforce them. L. Ron Hubbard, its founder and creator, was there. He is or was a phenomenal person, an endless, bubbling fountain of ideas, ideas that I came later to feel were largely fantasy masquerading as science. But the therapeutic techniques that he espoused seemed sound and simple. Whether they were actually therapeutic I'm not so sure.

The people involved, both faculty and students, were strong, intelligent, appealing and forthright. The atmosphere was brisk and bracing--and during a Washington summer! It was one of the tenets of Scientology that each person was totally responsible for himself and his destiny, which I daresay was one of Win's justifications for withholding money from me. They tended to carry this idea to extravagant lengths. If you were downed in an airplane crash, or if a bridge collapsed under you, it was your own doing. Nonetheless, it's nice to have people err on the side of taking charge of their own lives.

Throughout the center, there was a pervasive cheerfulness, which I believe is characteristic of cults--people united by shared beliefs, who feel that they are on the cutting edge of truth, an avant garde, hoping to pull the rest of the world in the right direction. A fairly rigorous training program also tends to keep the level of energy high.

Crawford: A physical program?

Pippin: No. Not in the sense of gymnastics or calisthenics. But physical perhaps in the more basic sense of coming to terms with one's body and one's relationship to the physical universe. Learning to touch, to feel, to grasp, above all, learning to be in present time, to use their expression.

All of this I could go along with, but some other aspects of Scientology made me leery. Like most cults, it was founded on the worship of its leader, who was in fact a strong and impressive personality who often said the right things. I disliked the spirit of militancy, the popular science jargon, the pervasive salesmanship, the supernatural claims into which I had no direct insight, and most of all what seemed to me to be the confusion of spiritual and psychological development with power--power over other people, power to manipulate. After a few months of absorption I let go of it altogether.

Crawford: You have been interested in Jungian psychology, which contains elements of Eastern faiths as well.

Pippin: I've always felt, and still do feel, that playing the piano is an excellent approach to Zen Buddhism. Or vice versa.  
[laughter]

Win and I returned to San Francisco in late August, and disaster soon struck. The building above the magical room called Opus One, the scene of almost my entire concert life, was sold. The room was never again to be used for public assembly. It would be used for storage. A crime!

On account of fire laws, there was no chance of its being reconverted into a new Opus. Although it seemed that being so close to the street with such a wide stairway and with so little inflammable material made the fire risk minimal, still it did have only one entrance, not two. The city powers were willing to let stand a going concern, but they would never relicense it to a newcomer.

Now we're at the end of '57. We had to move, and this required raising money. The rent for Opus One had been one

hundred dollars a month, a modest sum that allowed a somewhat relaxed approach to business. But any place that we hoped to move into would be vastly more expensive, and would require the purchase of a costly liquor license. We would have to become more efficient.

It was necessary to raise money, and it turned out that I was the only person who succeeded in doing so. A dear friend named Rebecca Weinstock lent us three thousand dollars, and my brother, who lived in the area at the time and had always been strongly supportive, lent a thousand. Another friend, named Lou Ellingham, had just inherited ten thousand dollars at the death of his father. He was planning to go to Europe for a year. He offered to lend us a thousand on condition that we return it when he got back a year later and would no doubt be strapped. We were only too happy to accept money on almost any terms.

But a disturbing issue had come up that truly pushed my panic button. Out of the blue, Win warned me that he was thinking of discontinuing the concerts. This was a rude shock. He seemed willing to dispense with what I regarded as our entire reason for existence. I had no interest in getting involved with a bar whose sole purpose was selling liquor. The fact that he would even consider it was a serious jolt.

Crawford: Did he change? You said that he loved music.

Pippin: And still did, I believe. But this was partly Scientology at work, or at any rate his take on Scientology. To be a real person you had to throw your weight around. In the past, he had professed over and over again that he and I were equal partners--a mutual understanding that I had never put to the test. Now was the time! I reminded him of this basic agreement and that he couldn't discontinue the concerts without my consent. This sent him into orbit. "*Where* did you get the idea that we were partners? Me, going in with another person? Investing three, four years of my life?" [laughter]

Crawford: So that was the end of that chapter, no doubt.

Pippin: Thus the chapter ended. But it was clear that the next chapter would have to be started on a sounder basis. Despite ample reasons for distrusting Win, I still felt that the three of us --Win, me and Len--had worked together reasonably well. We were sort of a balancing act. Len and I together could cope with Win's more erratic moments, which alternated with moments of depth and lucidity. He was dynamic, the sort of person who

made things happen. We needed him. But we also had to exert some reasonable control.

We agreed to borrow money, but only if we could have a written agreement that the three of us were to be partners henceforth. Len and I would each be assigned 30 percent, Win 40 percent. These percentages, let me add, were entirely symbolic. Well, Win had no choice but to accept the terms, because there was no other money. A wiser person than I would have known that the battle had not ended. It was just beginning.

We moved to a place just two blocks away, on the corner of Jackson and Montgomery. It was larger than the room we were leaving and it lacked the charm and the personal touch. But it served. And the personal touch might evolve in time.

But from the outset, Win fiercely resented the constraints of partnership, however symbolic. He was determined to bring the whole thing crashing down, so that he could pick up the pieces after the crash. He was quite frank about this and his behavior certainly confirmed it. Nonetheless, despite daily conflict and growing animosity and frustration, life continued and the concerts did go on.

The new location was still called Opus One, but it was a far cry from the place where I had felt so much at home, the place with which I felt so strongly identified. Except for the concerts, I now distanced myself as much as possible. Letting go was easier than I expected because a rich life was developing elsewhere, in my loft above the potatoes and onions.

I had been joined there by an old friend from college, Bill Quinn, a person of extraordinary depth and magnetism, who brought with him an old friend of his, Kerwin Whitnah. They were both brilliant; they were both great talkers. And they disagreed *enough* to make for a constantly scintillating back and forth.

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Pippin: Other congenial, like-minded, younger people, notably John Casey and Willie Ortiz, were drawn into the mix to which they both added immeasurably. We developed a warm family relationship, always sharing the evening meal, which would go on for hours. Wine and conversation! Their capacity for both was somewhat greater than mine. But when it got too much, as it frequently did, I would fade off and go back to the piano. Their talk and my music became the twin ingredients of a good

life. All in all, a sweet compensation for the disappointments of Opus One, which had turned into a perpetual scene of devastation.

I suppose the final straw was when Lou, the friend who had lent the thousand dollars on condition that it be returned within a year, did indeed come back broke as he had predicted and wanted his money back. Win, who claimed to have no recollection of the agreed upon condition, was adamant that Lou not be given priority. Other creditors were clamoring for money as well. To me it was obvious that we were under a sacred obligation to repay the money to Lou as soon as possible. Not to do so was a total violation of trust. But Win could be formidable, and such a conflict seemed to invoke the full force of his inner powers. It was a maddening situation.

And so after much agonizing, I decided to abdicate, to renounce my claim entirely--a step that I would have taken long before except for the money that I had borrowed. But now I felt that I had a better chance of repaying it if I were not weighted down with further debts that the Opus was likely to incur. On the final night of 1959, on the eve of the next decade, Len and I both ceded the Opus to Win.

Crawford: Was the money ever repaid?

Pippin: Ironically, yes. And in a manner befitting a comic opera finale. Several months later, Opus One became a hot property, thanks to a national chain of Bunny Clubs--called so, I believe, because the waitresses were dressed like little bunnies, clad mainly in fluffy little tails. They were viewing the location with a covetous eye--not the bunnies but the bosses--and eventually bought up the lease for a handsome sum. The money went into escrow, so perforce the debts were paid, and the visionary concept of my youth became a Bunny Club.

After surrendering to Win, I did not leave Opus One immediately. In fact, it was my intention to stay on, to continue the concerts, hoping that Win, happy in his new preeminence, would be more docile, more cooperative, easier to work with. I had been getting a salary of fifty dollars a week. He now offered me twenty-five dollars. I protested, we haggled, eventually he said, "All right, you win, have it your own way, here's the contract." The contract said twenty-five dollars. [laughter]

Crawford: And you didn't take it.



Pippin: I did not. Instead, I started to explore for other venues. My dream for Opus One was dead, but there had to be a comparable place around where I could put on concerts. There were two promising possibilities--one was a place that had just opened not far off, called The Arenas. An extremely attractive room along cool, classical lines, circular, not unlike the original Opus. And just the right size. "This is it!" I thought, especially as the owner seemed so amenable to the idea. Then he added, "Of course we'll be serving food and drinks." I said, "Fine. Before and after, or during intermission." He said, "I mean during the performance."

Crawford: So it wasn't the right place.

Pippin: No, it was not.





### III FINDING THE OLD SPAGHETTI FACTORY: 1960

*The Old Spaghetti Factory's Evolutionary Stages; Programming Chamber Works; Thematic and Vocal Performances, from Four Generations of Bachs to Merrie England; The "Great Unknowns"; Robert Hughes and the Oakland Youth Chamber Orchestra; Guests Artists and Recitals*

Pippin: And I began to realize that the right place might not be so easily come by. Tragically, a couple of months later that same owner was brutally murdered. So it seems that my guardian angel had been on the alert. The other choice was the Old Spaghetti Factory.

Crawford: That's where I come in!

Pippin: [laughter] Well, the back room of the Old Spaghetti Factory has gone through a good many transformations in later years, but at this point in its evolution it was a drab, dowdy room indeed. It was small--less than half the size of what it later came to be when a wall was torn down. I believe it was seldom used, and in truth it was anything but inviting. The Spaghetti Factory was a huge place with a small kitchen, so there was no way they could expand the dining facilities without major surgery.

The back room had the great advantage of being cut off from the noise and bustle of the restaurant. It had a tiny, tiny stage that could barely accommodate a grand piano. Hold on! I've left out an important episode.

When seven years earlier I was resuming the Sunday afternoon concerts after the performance with Fiedler, Enrico bought me a piano he had seen advertised in a newspaper. The piano was owned by a man who, because he traveled a great deal, didn't feel like hanging on to it. He was asking sixteen hundred dollars for it. It was a beautiful instrument, a

Steinway of the late nineteenth century, one of the golden ages of piano building.

And it had a curious history, with personal relevance. When I lived in Richmond, a Russian boy a few years older than me, brought up in Shanghai, came to town. His name was Vladimir Havsky. He was a dazzling pianist. We became friends, and often played four-hand arrangements of Beethoven symphonies together. I revered him greatly. Later on, he was lent a magnificent piano, one that I sometimes played on myself. Its touch and tone were unforgettable. Now twelve years later, here it was, up for sale!

Crawford: Had you put Enrico in touch with the piano?

Pippin: No, it was utter chance. It was Enrico who sent me over to inspect it in response to the ad. The owner casually mentioned that he had lent the piano for several years to a gifted young pianist named Vladimir Havsky. Vladimir! I still have the piano to this day.

Crawford: This is the one that you play?

Pippin: It is the one that I played throughout the twenty-seven years of concerts in North Beach--first at the hungry i, then Opus One, then the Old Spaghetti Factory. I've not used it publicly in more recent years because luckily the places where we perform have all had excellent pianos, and I don't like moving mine around unnecessarily. It is kept at the house of a former board member and manager of Pocket Opera, who treats it with tender loving care.

Of course, the piano went with me to the Old Spaghetti Factory. There was room on the tiny stage for the piano and for nothing else. Not so good for chamber music.

Once again, from somewhere out of the blue, an angel came to my rescue. Someone that I didn't even know volunteered to build a stage extension for me. I don't even know how he knew of my plight. But build it he did, and it was an excellent, sturdy stage that could be easily assembled and disassembled. The other instrumentalists were placed on it while I sat at the piano in back.

Each week the room had to be transformed into a concert room. So I would come in regularly at one a.m. on Saturday nights to get it in shape. The long series was launched on May 8, 1960. I know this because I was looking through some old

programs just last night. But you know, I think that might be a good place to stop for now.

[Interview 3: December 11, 1996] ##

Crawford: We are meeting at the offices of Pocket Opera and we're about to begin interview number three, and it looks like you have something you want to start off with.

Pippin: Well, I want to continue where we left off. Remember, at the end of our last session, I had just arrived at the Old Spaghetti Factory, where Fred Kuh, the owner, opened his arms in welcome. There we began a concert series that was to continue for nineteen years.

I forget whether I described the Old Spaghetti Factory or not. Basically it was a friendly looking, spacious collection of rooms with high ceilings, a bit like a ramshackle old farmhouse. Fred was an avid collector of anything collectible. He himself lived on the third floor, and his apartment, which covered the entire floor, was chock full of things that he had picked up mostly at auctions. A totally random collection, or so it seemed to me. Much of it, of course, had penetrated to the Spaghetti Factory below, which was a kaleidoscope of kitchen chairs and tables, pieces of brick-a-brack, nineteenth-century statuettes, cameos, landscapes, et cetera.

That was the main dining room, which opened out to a back garden. But there was also a fairly small room in front--I can never make up my mind whether to call it the front room or the back room. It was hardly used. For one thing, the Spaghetti Factory, though a large place, had a small kitchen, so it was not a place that could expand indefinitely. And I suppose they'd really not found a use for that front room, which was located next door to an even smaller room where flamenco dancers performed six nights a week. Mercifully, they did not perform on Sunday nights. Sunday nights became mine!

Crawford: What was the address of the building?

Pippin: 478 Green Street. It's now occupied by the Bocci Restaurant and of course it is much changed.

During my years there, that front room went through an almost Darwinian series of evolutionary stages. At first, it had a tiny stage that barely accommodated the grand piano. Somebody whom I had not even met sized up the situation immediately and provided the solution--a stage extension that

he built himself. A gratuitous act of kindness that touches me deeply to this day.

Crawford: What was the size of the piano?

Pippin: Seven and a half feet. A Steinway. Somewhat smaller than a concert grand, but of course quite a bit larger than the usual baby grand.

It is an exceptional instrument that I am indeed fortunate to have. By that time, too, I had acquired a harpsichord which was far more portable than the piano. It could be easily shuffled offstage when not in use.

The metamorphoses, most of them for the better, started soon after my arrival. A theatre company came in, enlarged the stage and repainted the room in an *art nouveau* style, turning it into a charming little theatre. A couple of years later, the fire department came in to inspect and raised a collective eyebrow--for good reason, I might add. To pacify the inspectors, a wall was knocked out, an art gallery in front was eliminated, and the room was expanded to more than twice its former size. It now opened immediately onto the street.

This expanded room was of a size that one hundred people filled quite nicely. With one hundred fifty it felt crowded. With two hundred, which we often had, people were fitted together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. If one person moved, it meant that his neighbor had to move as well. [laughter] For some reason beyond my comprehension, the fire department set the seating limit at two hundred and thirty-eight. How on earth they arrived at that figure I cannot imagine. But we did not have to worry henceforth about our legality, although plenty of people worried about the fire hazard, especially when we plugged in the lamp and sparks flew out. [laughter]

Crawford: I remember it was hot!

Pippin: Who wouldn't? Ten minutes into every concert, and especially in the summer, the thermometer shot skywards. We seldom got through a performance without some people in the audience fainting.

Crawford: Performers, too?

Pippin: Never. Performers are made of hardy stuff. In more recent years, in other venues, performers have sometimes complained about the heat on stage. Never me. I have been through fire. I know what the real thing is like. I was thoroughly immunized

by the Old Spaghetti Factory. I daresay once you emerge from purgatory any place feels like heaven.

At first, the concerts pretty much continued the pattern set by Opus One--a good many solo piano recitals, played by others as well as myself, and duo recitals, violin-piano, clarinet-piano, what have you.

Baroque concerts were somewhat more ambitious in terms of size, but still usually confined to just four instruments--three plus harpsichord. But as the room expanded, so did the concerts. And the room was mine to do whatever I wanted to with!

Crawford: Was there a contract of any kind?

Pippin: I never had or wanted a contract. My relationship to the Old Spaghetti Factory was a matter of mutual benefit. I was not charged rent. Beer and wine were sold during intermissions only. I'm sure that the Old Spaghetti Factory made little money off the concerts, but the concerts did draw attention to the restaurant. They were prestigious, and of course people would often come for dinner before proceeding to the front room for the concert. So the Spaghetti Factory didn't suffer. I'm also certain that Fred Kuh derived satisfaction from supporting the arts in this extremely tangible way.

I felt some obligation to bring in a fair-sized audience, but this was entirely self-imposed. The subject never once came up. I never felt the slightest pressure, nor was I interfered with in any way.

Crawford: It sounds like an ideal situation.

Pippin: In many ways it was, but my relationship with the Old Spaghetti Factory was never an easy one. The atmosphere backstage at a busy restaurant is always tense. Pressure is high, the pace demanding, timing of the essence. And the forced smile takes its toll.

This was exacerbated at the Old Spaghetti Factory. As a benign gesture, and to surround himself with people to his own liking, Fred Kuh sought out waiters and waitresses at the art institute. Though no doubt welcoming the job, these artist-waiters were understandably inclined to feel that they were out of their element, wasting their talents on incompatible work. How well I knew! They tended to be touchy and irritable, and I suspected that they resented me precisely because I *was* doing the work I wanted to do.



And they seemed to resent the concerts because they were a nuisance. The people who lined up to get in were in the way. Kitchen doors had to be kept closed on hot summer nights to block out as much noise as possible. Cleanup work had to be done afterwards.

But my greatest surprise was that many of them were hostile to the music itself. God knows what it represented to them. Fred, luckily, was supportive, appreciative and friendly, but his personal style tended to be combative. Extremely intelligent, constantly witty, he seemed to regard conversation as a sparring match. This I could enjoy as an observer, but it was a game that I was not good at. We never had an easy conversation.

On the whole, throughout these nineteen years, I felt very much as an outsider. Or rather, like a person living in two separate worlds. Inside my concert room, with the doors closed, I felt uniquely blessed. A room of my own! Everything that I wanted! An extraordinary opportunity to create something altogether unique. Outside, it was a different story.

Crawford: What were your audiences like?

Pippin: It was generally agreed that they covered a wider spectrum than the usual concert audience. They must have been fairly young, because to this day, people by no means decrepit come up to me after nearly every performance to say something like, "We go back to the Old Spaghetti Factory days." It seems like a badge of honor. But I should add that it was not easy to get an audience to the Old Spaghetti Factory. Unlike the Opus, which had built up a natural clientele of classical music devotees, the Spaghetti Factory offered no such means of publicizing the concerts. It was hard to get to. Parking was atrocious, at times impossible. The seating was anything but comfortable.

But on the positive side, it meant that the people who came had made a real effort to do so. They came because they really wanted to. They were primed, and they were alert. And I have to admit grudgingly that it was because of the uphill challenge that the programs became as interesting as they were.

Crawford: Tell me more about the programs.

Pippin: Understand, it is not easy to maintain interest in a concert series that goes on and on for nearly two decades. As a pianist, my fondest wish was to perform the chamber music for piano and strings of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms,

and given my druthers, this would have been the core of my career.

But it was precisely these programs that it was hardest to draw an audience to. Brahms, even Beethoven, had to be sneaked into a program that offered something more striking, or an interesting theme or idea. I had to explore constantly for new ways to stimulate interest by doing things that were not done elsewhere.

One way was to devise programs with unusual combinations of instruments, and combinations that could be used flexibly. At that time chamber music concerts tended to be largely confined to a few standard ensembles--string quartet, piano trio, wind quintet. This format left out much interesting music.

An appealing program could be planned, for example, around a piece like Casella's *Serenata* for clarinet, trumpet, bassoon, violin and cello. With this highly unusual ensemble as a centerpiece, the possibilities of variation were endless--violin and cello, clarinet and bassoon, cello and bassoon, a trio for clarinet, cello and piano. Other combinations might involve flute, oboe or French horn. Or harp, or guitar. There are wonderful quintets for guitar and string quartet, for example. And contemporary composers are constantly reaching out for new color combinations.

Instead of using an entire ensemble for an entire program, it was my practice to break it down into smaller units. Even with a conventional medium like a trio of piano, violin and cello, I would tend to start with a trio, then do a piano-violin sonata, then a cello-piano sonata, then another trio.

Crawford: Unusual programming at the time.

Pippin: More so than today. But the most important expansion over the old days at Opus One was this: for the first time, I was allowed to use singers.

Crawford: Allowed to?

Pippin: Allowed to, yes, because at the Opus we did not have an entertainment license. For some reason that I leave to others to figure out, singers were classified as entertainers, instrumentalists were not.

This opened up an entirely new world, an entrance into the vast range of vocal music, not only for voice and piano, but for voice and a wide variety of small instrumental ensembles,

from Baroque to contemporary. Indeed, going further back into the mysteries of Medieval music.

With this arsenal of resources, we began to explore programs that related to a particular theme or idea. I would like to talk about several of these.

A favorite of mine we called Music of the Bach Family for four generations. Of course, the Bachs were one of the great royal families of Baroque music. We started with a fine overture for four unspecified instruments by one of his uncles. Then some music by the great master himself, from which, needless to say, there is an infinite wealth to draw on. The third generation could be represented by one of at least three of his sons.

Johann Christian, his youngest, wrote some of the most charming and delightful early classical music, prefiguring Haydn and Mozart. Personally, I have never particularly warmed up to the music of Carl Philip Emmanuel, though he was probably the most highly esteemed living composer during his lifetime, rated far higher than his old-fashioned father, whose music was hardly known at all. There was another son named Wilhelm Friedemann, whom Bach himself considered his most talented son, but he was something of a wastrel, and there is an overwhelming reason to hold him in infamy.

Crawford: Whatever did he do?

Pippin: A crime against humanity! At the time of Bach's death, his manuscripts were equally divided between his two eldest sons-- Carl Philip and Wilhelm Friedemann. Carl Philip evidently did not consider them worth doing much with, but he did store them neatly in the attic, no doubt neatly tied with a ribbon. Heaven only knows what Wilhelm did with his collection. It has disappeared without a trace. So even though the sheer amount of music that we have by Bach is staggering, it still is only a fraction of what he actually wrote.

Crawford: How terrible!

Pippin: Heartrending! I suspect that there was considerable tension between father and sons. He was probably not an easygoing person, and furthermore, taste was shifting during his lifetime. Bach remained stubbornly true to the losing side, while his sons led the coming revolution!

Crawford: You mentioned a fourth generation as well?

Pippin: Yes, a grandson. I don't even remember the initials that identify him. In the music of the third generation one notices a turn towards lightness and frivolity. In the next generation, the trend continues at an alarming pace. The grandson left only one piece that I am aware of: a piece to be played by three performers at one piano. He left specific instructions as to how this was to be done: a man is to be seated in the middle, with a woman on each side. Further, the man is to play the uppermost part with his right hand, and the lowermost part with his left. A footnote explains that it is necessary--essential--that they sit very close. Would grandfather Bach have scowled or smiled? I wonder.

In our performance I was lucky enough to have Gita Karasik and Jeanne Stark close to me on either side, our arms gracefully intertwined. [laughter]

There was no fifth generation. Though Bach was the father of twenty-two children, after two generations the Bach line was extinct--a startling insight into the mortality rates of that era when going to your doctor was practically tantamount to going to your executioner.

Crawford: Tell me of some of your other thematic programs.

Pippin: Three Centuries in Vienna was one that offered an inexhaustible wealth to draw from--Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, Schoenberg, Webern, Berg. From the twentieth century we used a fine transcription made by Schoenberg himself of his *Kammersymphonie*, a reduction for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano--very difficult but very beautiful.

Another program: French Renaissance, Baroque and Impressionist. The latter was represented by the Debussy Trio for flute, harp and viola.

Also, Monteverdi and the Italian Baroque, which included *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* and some gorgeous vocal duets, among other things.

A Celebration of Merrie England I particularly enjoyed, largely because of a delightful twentieth-century setting of *The Canterbury Tales* for voice, harpsichord and two wind instruments. Of course, he used only small excerpts from the exceedingly long fourteenth-century poem, but they were well chosen and all in middle English. The Elizabethans provided much merriment, as did Purcell a hundred years later. Also I discovered a collection of songs from the Restoration theatre that were both witty and bawdy. Only the words and the tunes

were given, so I provided settings for harpsichord and various instruments.

A group came in with a program not of my planning called A Concert at Windsor Castle, circa 1880, music that Queen Victoria might have requested. She was in fact a connoisseur and champion of composers like Mendelssohn, Rossini, Donizetti and Verdi. I put together a more serious program called *Fin de Siecle*, songs by Mahler, Strauss, Wolf and Brahms.

Landmarks of the Twentieth Century for violin and piano was an ambitious undertaking, planned and performed by Austin Reller and myself.

More general themes would be based on Music and Theatre, Music and Dance, or Music and Poetry. Music and Theatre might include a centerpiece like Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*, which we did as a concert suite. Later on, as Pocket Opera, we did the full shebang--with narration, acting, staging--dancing, no less.

Crawford: You weren't narrating?

Pippin: Not at that point. To round out the Music and Theatre program, there is music related to the Restoration theatre--Purcell provides an abundance. There is music related to French classical drama, music related to German nineteenth-century drama, not to mention the Elizabethans or the theatre of the twentieth century.

Music and Poetry might feature the Edith Sitwell-William Walton *Facade*. In our performance, the two distinguished readers were Lou Harrison and Ned Rorem. One of our favorite local composers was named Robert Hughes, also notable as a bassoonist and conductor. He is a good friend of Lou Harrison, whose music he has tirelessly promoted, as he has done also for the music of Ezra Pound. But also a fine composer in his own right.

Let me digress for a moment and tell you a bit more about him because probably no one else has contributed so much to give the Spaghetti Factory concerts their distinctive character. I met him first as a performer, and soon learned that he was a composer as well. We did an enchanting piece of his called *Estampie*, for celeste and tack piano. This was soon followed by a wildly dramatic piece for trombone, garden hose and percussion, called *Anagnorisis*. This is a term from Aristotle's *Poetics*, so Bob tells me, meaning the moment when a tragic hero recognizes the full implications of his fate.



The introduction of the garden hose may sound like a joke, but in fact, when skillfully used, it becomes quite a respectable musical instrument--trust Bob to discover that!

Another piece was for Mexican clay flute, five coffee cans and jalataranga, which means tuned water bowls--tuned, that is to say, by filling them to precise levels of water. Tuning the bowls during intermission, incidentally, elicited this overheard exchange: "What are they doing?" "I think they're about to feed the jalataranga." I might add that the five coffee cans make a delightfully delicate percussion ensemble.

This was followed in the late sixties by *Elegy for Vietnam followed by a Protest*. The *Elegy* was a beautiful, dark piece for cello and four bassoons. As you can see, each of these pieces was an exploration of new sonorities, but the sonorities were not a mere end in themselves. They were used for making expressive, highly charged music.

He wrote a song cycle based on the poetry of one of our cherished audience members, a poet named Hester Storm, who attended the concerts every week and sometimes reviewed them for a small weekly. Bob, an avid poetry reader, discovered her work and composed a group of songs called *Storm Cycle*. He had also composed a cycle based on *Poems from the Palatine Anthology*, a collection of short Greek poems discovered not too long ago. Both of these cycles were written for four voices and for such an esoteric collection of instruments and for specific players with such diverse and specialized skills that duplicate performances seemed highly unlikely. A philosophical statement that I much admire!

Music and Dance. The question is, when did they ever separate? Separate they did, but dance so thoroughly permeates our Western music tradition that it would be hard to devise a program that was not linked to dance. But no harm in calling attention to the linkage! Consider the piano solo repertory alone--the Bach suites, Chopin mazurkas and polonaises, Schubert laendler, Brahms waltzes, Prokofiev ballet music, Bartok dances in Bulgarian rhythms, American ragtime. This, of course, barely scratches the surface.

There were also programs that tended to sound embarrassingly like a college course: The Evolution of the Sonata, for one.

Besides these thematic programs, we would often do programs that were centered on a single composer, or on a pair of composers. One series that I particularly enjoyed putting



together was called The Great Unknowns. Not quite whom you would expect to find: The Unknown Haydn, The Unknown Schubert, The Unknown Chopin, The Unknown Beethoven. The fact is that there is an enormous amount of music by all of these composers that is seldom if ever performed, for reasons that have nothing to do with intrinsic quality.

For example, Haydn wrote a lot of vocal music, including operas and cantatas, that is largely neglected, plus a huge collection of trios for piano, violin and cello. These are seldom performed by established ensembles because they give the lion's share to the piano, and string players don't enjoy being treated as second-class citizens. I'm sure that we came up with a fine violinist and cellist who could endure the humiliation for an evening. Aside from this "defect," the trios are among Haydn's finest works.

Crawford: And what would be the Unknown Chopin?

Pippin: Here there is not such a quantity to draw on, but still enough to make a sizable and impressive program. He wrote a fine trio for violin, cello and piano, also some lovely songs in Polish, for piano and voice. He wrote a delightful polonaise for cello and piano, and a cello sonata which in fact is his last major work and one of his ripest. I can't imagine why it is not played more frequently. I've heard that it's because the piano tends to dominate the cello, and it's true that the piano part is difficult and demanding, but it seems to me that the cello has quite enough to do to make a reasonably modest cellist happy.

Some of his pieces for solo piano are seldom performed. For example, an *Allegro de Concert*, a large-scale work, probably planned as a third concerto. But he only finished one movement of it and decided to dispense with the orchestra and make it a piano solo. It's an impressive, powerful and beautiful work, also very difficult--a factor that ordinarily doesn't drive pianists away. There are also some early rondos, Chopin in his superficial, glittery style, but delightful nonetheless. So you see, it adds up to a good-sized program.

Now the Unknown Beethoven, aha! [laughter] There's a sonata for French horn and piano. The first time we played this, Bonnie Hampton did the horn part on the cello. Zara Nelsova, a distinguished cellist, was in the audience. She rushed up afterwards and said, "Where did you find that wonderful cello sonata?" The Beethoven trios for violin, cello and piano are played, but there are a couple of equally fine

sets of variations that are not. Most of his many sets of variations for piano solo are likewise neglected.

The list goes on. Beethoven's songs are seldom sung. There's one particular collection that should be wildly popular, one that fits ideally into a chamber music program. In his later years, he was commissioned to write settings of English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh folksongs, for voice, of course, with violin, cello and piano.

It seems that Beethoven got carried away with the project, as he came out with over a hundred of these arrangements. For some reason or other, these songs are usually dismissed by critics and biographers as potboilers, but to my mind, they are a wonderful balance between sophisticated, artful music and the often powerful, always delightful songs on which they are based. And they sound like Beethoven through and through.

These single composer programs would often be based on a single work, like Bach's *Musical Offering*, the Schubert and Schumann song cycles, Hindemith's *Das Marienleben*, or Strauss' setting of *Enoch Arden* for piano solo and speaker. More often they would be based on a set of works: the Bach suites for solo cello, also those for solo violin; the Mozart violin-piano sonatas, which are among my favorites of all his music; Austin Reller, David Abel and Anne Crowden each did a series with me. Austin Reller also did the Beethoven violin sonatas, as well as the Brahms. We also did the collected Beethoven trios and the Brahms trios.

A series of concerts was called Meet the Composer--always living, and usually local. Sometimes singly, sometimes paired. These included Lou Harrison, William Bolcom, Thea Musgrave, Ned Rorem, John Edmunds, Ernst Bacon and many others.

John Edmunds was a special case because, aside from being a gifted and prolific songwriter, he had done extensive research in Italy and his special interest were the cantatas of Benedetto Marcello and Alessandro Scarlatti. Talk about unknowns! John claimed that if the music of Alessandro Scarlatti were known, people would recognize that his genius overshadowed that of his more famous son fully as much as J.S. Bach's genius overshadowed that of his own sons.

Both Marcello and Scarlatti wrote a huge number of cantatas for solo voice and basso continuo--cantatas that exist to this day only in manuscript. John copied them out in his meticulously neat hand--these were the pre-xerox days--and

composed settings for many of them. To my mind, they rival the best of Handel. Praise can go no higher!

Crawford: Did you ever do a Scarlatti opera?

Pippin: No, and except for the cantatas that John resurrected, I have little acquaintance with Alessandro Scarlatti. The few operas that I have encountered I found disappointing. I suspect that I shall eat my words one of these days.

With William Bolcom, I have to admit that I am cheating a bit, in that he played for us in '59 at Opus One. I had heard him play at someone's house and was dazzled by his playing, as I still am. His recordings of ragtime are a revelation.

Lou Harrison, who also became much more famous later on, gave several programs of his own music, often featuring oriental instruments, for which he has a deep interest and love. He even gave the premiere, at least in part, of his opera *Young Caesar*, which I understand is being done in New York next year, thirty years later.

In the more usual chamber music programs there was often interspersed music by local composers, like Richard Felciano, Andrew Imbrie, and Leland Smith. Dare I call Darius Milhaud a local composer?

I mentioned before that Baroque concerts were a mainstay at Opus One. That continued to be the case, but now they were expanded. Several times a year we would do a concert of Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque music. Of all of our concerts, these were the most consistently well attended. Now of course the real glory of Renaissance music is in the vocal polyphonic music, usually on a very large scale. This I never attempted to approach. But in the byways, in the nooks and crannies, there is much of interest and delight, in the dance collections, in the song collections, collections of consort music.

Interest in early instruments was high, and these concerts always featured recorders, krumphorns, the rebec, the viola da gamba, and occasionally the sackbut. We had outstanding players in Peter Ballinger, a marvelous recorder virtuoso, and Mary Abbott, who played beautifully on any number of instruments. Anna Carol Dudley was our star singer. I was particularly interested in Medieval songs, for which I did a number of settings. Bear in mind that we have only the tunes, with no indication whatever of how they are to be performed. Often even the rhythm is open to question.

##

Crawford: Where did you do your research?

Pippin: Mostly at the UC Library in Berkeley, surely one of the best in the country. Much of this early music is collected in encyclopedic anthologies. Believe me, if xerox had not been invented, these concerts would not have been possible.

The Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque programs lent themselves to special themes. Each year, shortly after New Year's Day we would do a Twelfth Night program. Later in the year--guess when--La Primavera, spring, about which there is plenty of music in celebration.

In addition to these programs, which for the most part I organized myself, we had a good many visiting groups that provided their own program. Probably the most famous of these was the New York Pro Musica. They gave a couple of concerts that, needless to say, were packed to the rafters.

The John Biggs Consort was very popular in the sixties. Sally Terry was their vocal soloist. They gave a wonderful program of mostly Renaissance but also some contemporary music. The Berkeley Chamber Singers also performed for us, as well as a vocal group called the Renaissance Octet. And the Elizabethan Trio with Laurette Goldberg, Judith Nelson and Anna Carol Dudley.

Ian Hampton, a splendid cellist who had done the Beethoven cello sonatas with me, brought down the Vancouver String Quartet.

No doubt our most ambitious undertaking in terms of sheer size was the introduction of the Oakland Youth Chamber Orchestra, conducted at the time by Robert Hughes, whom I've already spoken of. He was eager to give the kids a broader outlet. Well, when you set up chairs for an entire orchestra, it was truly startling to see how little room was left over. [laughter] But nonetheless, with people pressed against the walls, we managed to accommodate a respectable audience.

I must admit that I had my own special greedy reason to include the Oakland Youth Orchestra, because this was my opportunity to play a concerto. They came back about half a dozen times over the years, later under Denis de Coteau.

Crawford: How many players?

Pippin: Thirty or thirty-five. A good-sized orchestra for that room, as you can imagine. Bob was an impeccable musician, and I'm sure a wonderfully stimulating teacher and conductor, besides being a generally marvelous person to have around.

Crawford: Which concerti did you play?

Pippin: Four by Mozart, plus a Concert Rondo, and also an early work by Chopin, *Variations on Mozart's "La ci darem la mano."* This was his Opus 2, and it was this work that elicited a famous review from Schumann. The review began, "Hats off, gentlemen! A genius!" This is so touching. Chopin was nineteen at the time. I was startled to realize, good Lord, Schumann was exactly the same age! Such insight! Such confidence! Above all, such generosity!

I might add that my career playing concerti did not quite end there. I found out that several more of the Mozart twenty-seven piano concerti were written with a specific option that they could be played with a string quartet. Believe me, I played them all! Also Bach left seven concerti for keyboard and string orchestra, which meant that they also could be played with string quartet. Plus several concerti by Haydn. A substantial repertoire!

Getting back to visiting groups, one of my favorites was called The Macedonian Silver String Band, which returned several times. The folk music of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary and Romania is utterly enchanting and unique. This group had apparently done massive research and they seemed to have mastered the idioms and style. It was music I had never heard before, colorful and rhythmically fascinating, the music that Bartok drew from. With singers and instrumentalists, often interchangeable, and in various combinations, it was a blissful program.

Crawford: Were they local people?

Pippin: I believe so. One of them, incidentally, who played viola and sang entirely in the folk style--non vibrato, very straight tone--was Lorraine Hunt, now Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, a most highly acclaimed opera star, far removed from these Macedonian roots.

Another group whose performance frankly I don't remember--it could have been that I was sick that night--was called the Bengal Folk Band.

Crawford: Did you find all these people yourself?



Pippin: They would often call me. When it sounded like a good idea, I was more than delighted to welcome them. Usually I would know at least one person in the group, which gave a reasonably reassuring guarantee of quality. There were other independently formed wind and string ensembles, among them the Nouveau Wind Quintet, Baroque Brass, et cetera.

In addition to the visiting groups, there was a long and impressive list of solo recitalists. Some of the most memorable piano recitals of my entire life I heard at the Old Spaghetti Factory. Pianists such as Gita Karasik, Sylvia Jenkins, Justin Blasdale, William Corbett Jones, Janet Guggenheim, Nathan Schwartz, Jerry Kuderna, Laura Nicolaisen, Roy Bogas, Pamela Resch, Julie Steinberg, Zola Shaulis, Margaret Tan, and probably the most famous of them all, Ursula Oppens.

Crawford: Quite a list.

Pippin: Staggering! It truly is. The two most impressive performances of the *Goldberg Variations* I've ever heard were given by Zola Shaulis and Pamela Resch. Margaret Tan gave the finest performance I've ever heard of the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*.

On one special occasion, Karl Ulrich Schnabel appeared, entirely as a gesture of friendship and support. It was an all-Schumann program, in which he played the *Papillons* and accompanied several groups of songs. He's come to the Bay Area for many years as a teacher and has given master classes and private lessons, both of which I've taken, incidentally. An inspiring teacher, a radiant personality and a very special pianist.

Another pianist who for me was a revelation, with some of the most extraordinarily sensitive and vital playing I've ever heard, was David del Tredici. He later on won a Pulitzer Prize as a composer, and as far as I know, has abandoned any career as a pianist.

The last I heard of him as a pianist was when he participated in a stunt performance which, as I recall, consists of thirty-two measures with the instruction that they are to be repeated two hundred and thirty-eight times. Well, you know, New Yorkers will do anything, so one night it was evidently decided to present the piece in its entirety, which meant that the pianists would perform in shifts, each of them playing their repeats for an hour or so. Presumably the audiences came and went in shifts as well. At the end of the performance someone reportedly cried, "Encore!"



What a grotesque waste of talent! I remember to this day his performance of ten intermezzi and capriccios by Brahms, of the Schubert big A Minor Sonata, of Chopin ballades, of Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, of Bartok's *Out of Doors Suite*, of a long, densely elaborate and impossibly difficult piece by Villa-Lobos called *Rudepoema*.

In addition to the pianists, we had a number of first-rate violinists who gave recitals as well: Austin Reller, Linda Ashworth, David Abel, Nathan Rubin, George Nagata, Sabina Skalar among them. Violists John Graham, James Carter, Pamela Goldsmith. Cellists Bonnie Hampton, Helen Stross, Ian Hampton, Paul Tobias, Neal La Monico. Two nationally known flautists, Ransome Wilson and Alain Marion, and clarinetist Richard Stoltzman. Bruce Haynes, a specialist in Baroque oboe and recorder gave a recital, performing on both.

Often these were people who were traveling through, and some as well that were staying longer. Marion was giving a master class at the conservatory. Stoltzman was at the time centered here as music director of Young Audiences.

[the following seven paragraphs were added by Mr. Pippin during the editing process]

Crawford: Were these concerts reviewed in the San Francisco papers?

Pippin: By the mid-sixties we were getting excellent coverage from the likes of Robert Commanday, Marilyn Tucker, and Heuwel Tircuit on the *Chronicle*, Allan Ulrich and Arthur Bloomfield on the *Examiner*, as well as critics on the *Oakland Tribune*, *Sacramento Bee*, and *San Jose Mercury*. However, this was slow in coming. The first twelve years or so we were almost never reviewed.

One day I decided to take the situation in hand. I typed out a list of the repertoire that we had performed in the past year alone, along with many of the better known musicians who had participated. The list went on for about eight closely typed pages. The compositions were listed chronologically started with Monteverde, though in fact by this time we were already doing a good deal of Medieval music, much of which is anonymous. The music of Bay Area composers took up a full two pages. I thought it a most impressive list. A large proportion of it was music that was *never* performed in the standard venues.

So I called up the three leading critics of the three San Francisco dailies and went to see them. First to Arthur Bloomfield at the *Call-Bulletin*. He showed great interest, but

I soon gathered that he was interested on account of an article that he was writing in which he argued that the musicians in the San Francisco Symphony did not need the pay raise they were fighting for because of the many opportunities they had to earn money elsewhere. You can imagine how close to a living wage an occasional appearance at the Old Spaghetti Factory would provide!

A bit put down, I went next to Alexander Fried at the *Examiner*. He glanced through the pages, looked up and said wearily, "All that noise!" Surely the most devastating words that have ever been spoken to me.

Badly shaken, I went finally to Wallace Dean at the *Chronicle*. With considerably less confidence, I handed him my sheets of paper, explaining that the music was listed chronologically started with Monteverdi. His words were, "In my opinion Monteverdi couldn't care less."

It was an appalling day. However, things did change and, as I said, we had excellent coverage for about twenty-five years, after which the doors abruptly closed again. Since '91, the press has stayed away almost entirely.

Crawford: What a lot of planning all this must have taken!

Pippin: Well, an evolutionary step happened in the summer of '65 that may seem slight, like most evolutionary steps, but it changed my life enormously. Till then, for several years, I had been mailing out a monthly announcement that would list the next four or five Sunday night programs. These announcements were also posted in various places.

This was a murderously time-consuming process. I had a primitive addresserette machine and several boxes of address cards. But we live in a most horribly mobile society! You never realize how much so until you're confronted each month with updating a mailing list. My mailing list was not large, never more than seven or eight hundred, but it was an onerous task.

Suddenly a little bright light turned on. Instead of putting out a program each month, why not plan a more extended series that would cover three months and include a dozen concerts? Not only would it mean sending out the mailing list only three or four times a year, but also being able to plan a series on a larger overall design. You'd be amazed at the

number of people who were suddenly convinced that I was doing three times as much as I had been doing previously! People would take a look at these twelve concerts and say, "My goodness! How impressive!" Whereas before, looking at only four, it was "Ho hum."

Two and a half years later, the light turned on again. I got another bright idea! I woke up one morning and thought, "Why don't we do an opera?"

Crawford: Ah, the dawn of a new day!

Pippin: Well, definitely a new chapter.

## IV DISCOVERING OPERA: 1968

*Opera Beginnings: Bastien and Bastienne and other one-acters; Thoughts about Translation; The Handel Treasury; Introducing Narration: Admeto; Fashioning Narrations and Casting; Verdi's King for a Day, a Problem Tenor, and an Aborted Visit from The New York Times; Don Pasquale and Orchestrating; Taking Liberties with L'Ajo nell'Imbarazzo (Tutor in a Tangle)*

[Interview 4: January 1, 1997] ##

Crawford: Let's start with the realization that you could do opera. Eureka!

Pippin: The realization--well, it happened one bright day which I date back to January of '68. We had already done several precursors of opera--Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which of course is a genuine opera and an extraordinarily prophetic one at that. In the course of a Medieval concert, we had even done a twelfth-century work called *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, said to be the first opera extant--brief and charming. But the new idea was to do a one-act opera as a way of giving variety and added interest to a program of chamber music. And because of the intimate nature of the surroundings, it was imperative that we do the opera in English. The opera that I hit upon, not unnaturally, was Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne*.

Though he was only thirteen when he wrote the opera (his third!), it's an extraordinarily mature work, both musically and dramatically. And it is an especially difficult piece to translate, although I didn't know it at the time. Difficult because it should sound perfectly simple. The story is about two naive teenagers in love, who are having a spat. Their language should sound natural, sincere, spontaneous, unaffected --all of this in rhymed verse.

I had no great ambition to be a translator, but I did want to communicate. If I had found existing translations to my liking, I would not have ventured on my own. But those that I did find seemed hopelessly clumsy and archaic.

Crawford: Want to say whose?

Pippin: No, the fact is, I don't know whose they were. But I'm afraid they were typical of the translations then available. Up until Ruth and Thomas Martin came into the scene, translations tended to be arcane, elaborate, old-fashioned and virtually incomprehensible to the ear. They did attempt to be literally faithful to the original, but I think this is a misguided primary goal.

The Martins were a vast improvement over what had gone before. They cut through the undergrowth of verbiage, and for the most part succeeded in making sense. But in aiming for clarity and simplicity, they lapsed into banality. I find their translations unsatisfactory because they went to the opposite extreme, and because they show little concern for the music in words.

My own early translations were not all that great either. Years later, after much experience, I went back and gave this, my first translation, a complete overhaul. In fact, this was necessary for all of the translations that I did for at least ten years. After you've just written something, it's easy to deceive yourself into thinking it's much better than it is. The test comes a few years later when you go back and read it in cold blood. This can be a painful enlightenment. And so it was when I reread all of my early translations.

Crawford: When did you first perform *Bastien and Bastienne*?

Pippin: We opened the season of '68 with an all-Mozart program that featured *Bastien and Bastienne* with a string quartet, two oboes, two horns and three singers. Also included in the program, for purely selfish reasons, was a Mozart piano concerto.

Many of the Mozart piano concerti are in fact written in a way that makes them playable with string quartet accompaniment. This is even sometimes specified--at least in four cases that I know of. No doubt with the Old Spaghetti Factory in mind. The Concerto in E flat, K. 271, was the one chosen for this program --an extraordinary work, written in his teens but more like the music of at least ten years later. It has one of the great,

great tragic slow movements of all time, meditative and passionate.

Alas, the season opened in most unfortunate circumstances: San Francisco was in the middle of a newspaper strike. Having no other means of publicity apart from a few hundred fliers, we were absolutely dependent on the free calendar listings that the newspapers gave us. Singers and players all agreed to perform for a split of the door. A good thing for me, because we had a tiny audience of about thirty-five people. Times were bleak.

Crawford: This was not staged and costumed.

Pippin: To put it mildly! At that point in the many periods of metamorphosis of the F. W. Kuh Memorial Auditorium (as the room was legally though laughingly named) the stage consisted of a platform about the size of a large dining room table, perched on two-by-fours. The singers could hardly move around even if they had wanted to. The focus was to be on music and words, with characterization that could be conveyed with minimum motion. A lot can.

We added one major innovation. In the original, the musical numbers are separated by spoken dialogue. I decided to replace the dialogue with narration.

Crawford: Was this the first time you had tried that?

Pippin: Not entirely. I'd tested my feet in the water a few times, but this was a further step in that direction. However, the story of *Bastien and Bastienne* is extremely simple, so the narration could consist of just one or two sentences between each number. This made it possible to move the story at a brisk pace, and it offered an opportunity to give a focused point of view. A lot can be contained or implied in the briefest summation.

Crawford: You've said that your narration was "bold and possibly indefensible."

Pippin: Oh, really! [laughter] Well, I'm not sure that I would go for either adjective at this point. Maybe for some of the later, more elaborate narrations. It was bold for me, however, like any unaccustomed role. It was an adventure.

And the venture took off. The thirty-five people present were most enthusiastic, and bitten by the bug, I was dying to go further. I started looking around for other one-act operas that could be done with similar modest resources.



The next selection was a comic piece by Telemann called *Pimpinone*, also tailor-made for the Old Spaghetti Factory. For only two singers with string quartet. It was originally intended to be performed as three intermezzi sandwiched between the instrumental numbers of a concert. Exactly what I was looking for!

For me, *Pimpinone* was quite a stride over *Bastien and Bastienne*. More in the buffa style, rather than the naturalistic, it offers more opportunity to play with words, which after all are my favorite playthings. Its story is highly conventional, but realistically, tartly observed about a shrewd, scheming servant. A pretty girl inveigles her way through charm and flattery into the household of a rich old man by becoming his maid. That's intermezzo one. Intermezzo two: still on her best behavior, she pursues her ambitions and becomes his wife. Intermezzo three: the chips are down. *Don Pasquale*, anyone? She reveals her true colors. There is a shouting match from which she emerges triumphant, and he comes out sadder and wiser. But alas, still married!

Each intermezzo consists of three arias followed by a duet. Each of the four numbers is separated by a vast amount of recitative. I cut the recitatives entirely and, as with the Mozart, replaced them with a brief narration. That may have been what I called bold and indefensible, because in this case I was cutting not mere spoken dialogue but actual music that Telemann wrote.

However, these recitatives in all candor were stuff that any hack composer could have dashed off. There was no intrinsic musical loss, and their inclusion would have made the piece considerably longer and probably tedious. As we did it, each intermezzo lasted about twenty minutes. And it was a great success. In this new form it was hailed by a critic as an unexpected masterpiece. Critics are so astute when they praise you! [laughter]

The next choice, very much in the same genre, was Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*. A similar story, except that here the girl is already the maid of the household, but scheming to become the mistress by the simple and effective device of pretending to be so already. She blithely goes her way ordering the master around, proving at every step that she is the stronger of the two. Finally he has no choice but to capitulate. She triumphs. In an age when women had few triumphs to boast of, this must have gone over big.

*La Serva Padrona* is a hard title to translate, because there's no English equivalent for *padrona*. I finally settled on *The Maid Promoted*, which at least appeases my appetite for alliteration. Oh. Lord, I've done it again!

Like *Pimpinone*, *La Serva Padrona* was also designed as intermezzi, but in this case intermezzi that were to be performed between the acts of an opera. Now for some arcane classical reason, no doubt traceable to Aristotle, comedy was not considered admissible in a lofty Baroque opera seria. But no rules had been designed for the intermissions! Audiences seemed to have hungered for something closer to reality, a respite from the conventional heroics. And comic intermezzi tended to provide just that--true-to-life situations with recognizably real people. Out of hundreds of intermezzi, *La Serva Padrona* is without question the most famous.

Apparently audiences found these intermezzi marvelously refreshing. In fact, from what I read about the habits of theatregoing in those days, audiences tended to drift around during the performance of an opera, to use it as an occasion for coffee and conversation. But they would flock back to their seats for the intermissions! [laughter]

*La Serva Padrona* consists of two intermezzi, and as in *Pimpinone*, each of them contains three arias followed by a duet, all of them separated by recitative. However in this case I did translate the recitatives and we did perform them, because here the recitatives offered lively interplay between the characters that narration could not do justice to. I confined myself to a brief introductory speech and let the opera speak for itself.

Other one-acters followed. *The Marriage Broker* by Mussorgsky was of special interest. He left it unorchestrated, for just piano solo. This was a relief--we had the rare privilege of utter authenticity! Whether he intended to expand it I don't know, but as it stands, in four scenes, it tells a complete story. Based on a Gogol story, the hero is straight out of Russian fiction--ridiculously passive, phlegmatic, suspicious. The other three people in the cast are knocking themselves out to move the immovable object and goad him into marriage.

The second scene introduces an enthusiastic marriage broker who's out of Moliere, valiantly trying to arouse his interest in a devastatingly beautiful girl of impeccable virtue that she has picked out for him. The slow fire is poked from the other side by an energetic, high-strung friend who has his own

reasons for wanting our hero to get married. He remains unstirred, calmly raising one objection after another. I forget what finally stirs him into action. I found the character contrasts very funny, and when we first done it-- when we first did it--[laughter]

Crawford: You're lapsing into the Russian syntax, no doubt.

Pippin: No, I'm lapsing into early North Carolinian. [laughter] When we first did it, we had a perfect cast: John Duykers as the slow-moving, self-absorbed hero; Orva Hoskinson as his hyperactive friend; Margery Tede as the loquacious marriage broker. Because they caught the feeling so well, it came off as I had hoped. We tried it again a few years later with a different cast who simply didn't get it. And since the humor depends entirely on characterization--the highest type of humor--it fell utterly flat. I've never taken it up again. Theatre can be so fragile!

In this opera, Mussorgsky was making a bold experiment: all recitative, no separate numbers, no verse. Entirely in the prose rhythm of natural speech. And I learned a valuable lesson. Orva Hoskinson, who has been such a powerful asset to the Lamplighters, and who took the role of the friend in the first performance, evidently did not care for my translation. He rewrote his own part almost entirely, and greatly improved it in the process.

Crawford: Good of you to say so.

Pippin: It was unavoidable, though I didn't enjoy admitting it. In my translation, the speech sounded too literary. The characters sounded as if they had stepped out of a nineteenth-century novel. Orva's was more direct, more vigorous, more pointed. I think he set me on the right path.

Soon afterwards, though, there came a major discovery, a revelation that took me in an altogether different direction. I was somewhat familiar with the Handel operas, having combed through them in search of arias to excerpt for concert performances. They offered lavish riches. The greatest of the arias were accompanied by string quartet, but many of them could be performed with solo violin and basso continuo, or solo flute, or solo oboe. All of them were ideally suited for inclusion in a chamber music program for voice and various instrumental combinations. The Bach cantatas offer a similar treasure, as do the even less familiar cantatas of Telemann.

But to go from this to an entire opera was a bold step indeed. Yet the Handel operas--about forty, all told--were precisely what I had been looking for: a treasury of indisputably great music that had been largely neglected. A new crusade! The lightweight, one-act operas that we had done up to this point were fine, but here was meatier stuff on hand.

These are long, rich, large-scale works, yet they can be performed with surprisingly modest resources. The casts are small, from four to seven singers who become the chorus at various points, and invariably at the end, which they did in Handel's day as well. The choruses tend to be brief and serve mainly to conclude each opera on an upbeat positive note. The Handelian orchestra is also modest, consisting basically of four strings and two oboes.

Of course, in an orchestra each string part would be multiplied. But nonetheless a string quartet can handle it quite nicely--with harpsichord providing a continuo. A bassoon is often helpful, and when an occasional obligato aria calls for bassoon, it is essential. Other instruments--flute, trumpet, French horn--are used sparingly if at all.

Crawford: A minimum use of horns, you say?

Pippin: Usually none whatever. Quite unlike the later classical style where the horn was constantly used as a sustaining instrument to enrich the texture. Handel used the horn, or a pair of horns, as an obligato instrument, with its own melody line. For example, there's a famous hunting aria in *Giulio Cesare* with horn and strings.

Crawford: No vast choruses.

Pippin: You're probably thinking of the oratorios, where he did use larger choruses. But there is a huge difference between the styles of the operas and the oratorios that came later. The oratorios are far more massive, more choral. I've eyed them longingly, but still from a distance! The operas are essentially intimate, consisting mostly of a succession of solo arias, usually between thirty and thirty-five, and here and there a duet or trio. The arias are usually not dramatic, usually not addressed to anyone, but simply the singer expressing his or her emotion at the moment--hope, jealousy, grief, anger, et cetera. The dramatic action takes place in the recitatives that separate each of the arias.

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Pippin: In short, they lend themselves to performance on our scale. Yet for all of their richness and beauty, these operas are quite different from what one usually expects of an opera nowadays. As I said, they are essentially intimate, essentially solo. The stories are often highly artificial, convoluted, and extremely choppy, due to an inviolable convention: after singing an aria, the singer leaves the stage, presumably to a hearty round of applause. Now whether this rule emanated from the singers or not I don't know, but it was rigidly observed. One pities the poor librettist!

Well, there were a couple of exceptions. A singer was allowed to fall asleep on stage after an aria. The singer could also stay on after an arietta, a miniature aria accompanied just by cello and harpsichord, which did not rise to the grandeur of an exit. But ordinarily if the hero was pleading with the lady to respond to his love, he could not stick around to see whether she did or not. He would leave the stage, whereupon she would express to the audience her reaction, whether of rapture or revulsion. And then she would leave and the story would bounce on to something else. One should stress, though, that though the situations were often artificial, the emotions they aroused were always real and profound.

Very cinematic in a way. Short scenes one after another, each seeming to start from a different point. Well, here we get into the bold and indefensible. I decided to omit the recitatives altogether and substitute narration. For one thing, this made the stories easier to follow. That, in fact, is the narrator's primary task. And for another, it made the operas considerably shorter.

Now at the Old Spaghetti Factory this was a vital matter. Bear in mind that this was a room that presumably held two hundred people, a limit that was often exceeded. And it was essential that every door be tightly closed to block out noise from the kitchen on one side and from the street on the other side. This meant that the temperature of the room, especially on summer nights, would rapidly rise to a stratospheric level. It was seldom that we got through an opera without someone in the audience passing out. It seemed to me that forty-five minutes should be the utmost length of an act. At intermission we could open doors and introduce a fresh supply of air and thus enable the audience to come out alive.

Though I had complete confidence in the power of the music, there was good reason for apprehension. It was no use pretending that this type of production was what Handel had in



mind. Quite the contrary. The operas were usually planned for the most elaborate stage effects and for the most spectacular scenery. Would narration be an adequate substitute? One could but wait and see. The first opera chosen was *Admeto*.

Crawford: Why did you choose it?

Pippin: It was chosen almost blindly, long before I was able to figure out what the story was about. However, I was familiar with several of the arias, which were on a high level musically. In those days I had just begun to study Italian, so making sense of the libretto was a struggle. I should add--I think even somebody far more adept in Italian than I was would have trouble with this libretto. The language is typically arcane, convoluted, much embedded in classical conventions and high-flown metaphors. But that is the very reason for turning it into narration.

Crawford: Did you have help with these, or was your Italian sufficient?

Pippin: Let's say it was improving. I usually managed to make out a plot that made sense, but not without a bit of guesswork.

Crawford: You had mastered French by that time?

Pippin: It was a few notches ahead of my Italian.

Crawford: Can you tell the French-learning story here?

Pippin: Okay. [laughter] Well, after I became interested in translation, after the bug had bitten me, I thought: if I'm going to be a translator, I'd better learn some languages. Clearly Italian would be the language to study, but I was more drawn to French.

As I told you before, what really lit the match was hearing that John Kennedy in the last year of his life was working on French for an hour a day to enable him to converse with DeGaulle. And I thought, if the President of the United States can find an hour each day to study French, so can I. Well, I must say that I spent much more than an hour a day. I soon became hooked.

Crawford: Did you read novels?

Pippin: Fairly soon, at first with an English translation close by. This method I suppose would be frowned on by most teachers, but I see it differently. It was like having a teacher at hand to clarify, to explain. At any rate, it enabled me to read a lot



and gradually to become independent. I enjoyed the reading very much, but eventually I felt the time had come to switch reluctantly to Italian. It was like leaving home to move to a new city where you don't know a soul.

Crawford: Could you speak French by then?

Pippin: Not then, or ever since. I did go to the Alliance Française here in San Francisco, which was a happy experience. And in '69 I graduated, so to speak, to the Alliance Française in Paris, which was even better. There it was a matter of five days a week, several hours a day. But I never became good at speaking.

Crawford: Did your Italian come up to the level of your French?

Pippin: Well, I read a good many Italian novels, too, using the same method. Great novelists that I had barely heard of before. I found it equally enjoyable. The Italian used in opera, however, is almost a language of its own. Not as remote and convoluted as Baroque Italian, but still, even in Verdi, the language is a far cry from the speech that is spoken or written today.

A friend of mine went to Germany equipped with German derived from nineteenth-century opera, to the vast amusement of the people that he spoke to. My own Italian would have been best suited to a graveyard at midnight, a besieged castle, or a palatial ballroom. Not so good for getting around Rome.

At any rate, I learned enough Italian to stumble through a Handel libretto, but the jungle was thick with underbrush and it was often difficult to see where the path was heading. I'd like to go through *Admeto* with you as an example. I have notes here of more or less the way I presented it way back then in the summer of '72.

First of all, I wanted to prepare the audience for the fact that *Admeto* is told in extremely artificial terms. Frankly, it was not the happiest choice for a beginning venture, because *Admeto* is rather more artificial than most of the operas.

But the story underneath the artifice is basically simple. Rather, it consists of four basically simple stories. It's the story of Admeto, the king, who is torn between his love for two women: for Alceste, his noble and beautiful wife, who makes the supreme sacrifice for her husband and then is human enough to wonder if he appreciates it sufficiently, and then rises to even greater heights by mastering her own jealousy; and for the

third character, Antigona, who loves Admeto unwaveringly but is uncertain of his feelings towards her; and finally it is the story of Trasimede, the king's brother, who loves Antigona, knowing full well that his love is unrequited.

Well, these are four perfectly recognizable situations, four aspects of love. Love and jealousy, of course, have been the fuel of drama throughout the ages, both in and out of the theatre. And this is the point I wanted to emphasize: Handel's music is faithful to the universal emotion, letting it speak profoundly and truly. But the Baroque age was one in which people did not go to the theatre to pay for what they could get at home for free. They wanted it dressed up with art, invention, fancy, extravaganza, and in this opera they got it to such a degree that it is tempting to soft-pedal some aspects of the story.

The opera opens with a truly serious scene in which there's no artifice whatsoever. Admeto, the king, is on his deathbed, but he's surrounded--well, I take it back; it does get a bit Baroque. He's surrounded by fierce specters that dance menacingly around him, flourishing daggers that drip with blood. Admeto, tormented, frightened, pleads with the shadows to leave him and says, "Since I must die, let me at least die in peace."

The king inquires about his brother Trasimede and is told that his brother--now here we get into the bizarre--his brother is acting very odd, that he spends all of his time staring at the portrait of an unknown woman that he holds in his hand and allows no one else to see.

After this seemingly inconsequential bit of information, the god Hercules, a current houseguest, comes to bid farewell to Admeto. Hercules is impatient to go off to fame and glory, little knowing that by staying right where he is, he is about to bring off his most spectacular accomplishment. His aria expresses his impatience to be off and his hunger for glory.

A message is received from the oracle, saying that Admeto can be restored to health, but only if someone near and dear to him will volunteer to take his place by going to death in his stead. Alceste, his wife, resolves to be that person. While Admeto sleeps, she bids him a loving farewell and expresses her hope that they will meet again among the blessed souls in Elysium. Again, a sublime expression of deep feeling.

The scene changes to a forest. Antigona, a Trojan princess --no relationship to Sophocles--enters disguised as a

shepherdess. Back to Baroque. The reasons for her disguise are obscure, but it seems that she's arrived upon these shores at Admeto's invitation in the expectation of becoming his bride. We are on murky ground. Admeto, who is happily married, has invited Antigona to come and marry him and this is never explained, never touched on.

Antigona is perplexed on finding that he already has a wife. Her outrage at his infidelity--at his infidelity to *her*, not his infidelity to his wife--is not lessened by the fact that they have never met. After all, she has sent him her portrait. The conventional meaning is clear: "Reject my portrait, reject me."

Now, if you'll think back a moment, you'll recall something about a portrait of an unknown woman in the hands of the king's brother. Underhanded doings are dimly implied. But for the moment, Antigona is simply a bewildered stranger helplessly cast upon a foreign shore. But there is hope that after traveling through troubled waters, the vessel of her destiny will finally reach a safe haven. As you may suppose, this is the gist of her aria.

Back in the palace, Alceste bids farewell to her family and, bidding them not to weep, draws tears from every eye. At the end of an aria of sublime simplicity, Alceste expires. Admeto springs to his feet, miraculously recovered, and his aria expresses joy at his new-found vigor.

Back in the forest, after Admeto's obligatory exit, a young man enters followed by a band of hunters. We infer that he is Trasimede, the king's brother, from the fact that he is carrying a picture on which his eyes are riveted. Looking up from the picture for a moment, he sees Antigona and is struck by a curious resemblance. She fervently denies any connection, insisting that she is the lowly shepherdess Roselia. He declares that were she carrying a bow, he would swear she was the goddess Diana. So the aria is about the goddess Diana.  
[laughter]

Trasimede takes off, as convention demanded, and Antigona, alone, compares herself not to the goddess Diana, but rather to the homeless swooping hawk that flies from shore to shore seeking its prey, thus ending the first act with a graphic metaphor.

The second act opens in the jaws of hell--quite literally, as the inferno is depicted as the gaping mouth of a giant monster. In the depths of the mouth we see the throne of

Pluto. Alceste is chained to a rock nearby. Not exactly the Elysian fields that she was hoping for. She is being tormented by two furies, while the sound of a horrid symphony pervades the region--the book's characterization, not mine.

Hercules appears at the entrance, descends into the mouth, fights off the furies that are torturing Alceste, smashes her chains, releases her, and carries her out of the underworld. The mouth of the monster closes. Now all of this happens during the course of a short piece for orchestra.

Released from the underworld, Alceste's first thought is of Admeto and how happy he will be to see her again, so she has an aria expressing her joy. Now you will notice that every aria is followed not only by an exit, but usually by a change of scene--something that Pocket Opera does quite well.

So we are now in the palace garden, where Antigona has been hired as a gardeness. Trasimede, the brother, enters, as ever steadfastly gazing at the picture in his hands. He notices the new gardeness, looks back at the picture, then again at Antigona. In a burst of impetuosity, he flings the picture to the ground and declares his love to the gardeness, whoever she may be.

After the aria, one would expect him to wait to see how his sudden declaration is received, but instead, he obeys the higher law--he makes an exit. It's just as well, for she answers, "Through mountains, through flames, through valleys, among brutes, among beasts, I shall remain ever faithful to Admeto." Bear in mind, they still have not met.

Trasimede's fascination with the picture has aroused curiosity, so when one of the king's spies sees it on the ground where Trasimede has thrown it he takes it to the king. One glance and Admeto is galvanized like his brother. Upon being told that this is the princess Antigona, recently killed in the Trojan war, he realizes that his brother has tricked him. Not only has he kept the portrait for himself, but he's compounded the misdeed by sending Admeto a picture of a different woman, claiming her to be Antigona.

Even though this revelation is unconsummated by an aria, the scene changes, to a highway where Alceste is making her way back to the palace disguised as a soldier. She has by now gotten over some of her initial exuberance at being restored from the underworld and has begun to wonder whether Admeto will be so eager to see her after all.

She decides to test him by sending Hercules in advance to inform Admeto that his mission has been a failure and that he has had to return from the inferno empty-handed. He can then judge from Admeto's reaction the kind of reception she is likely to get. Hercules gone, she gives vent to her jealousy, which is indeed another hell. Again, a convoluted situation brings forth a passionate aria expressing a universal and timeless emotion, followed by an exit.

In turn, it is followed by an aria wherein Admeto, alone, broods on the problem of being simultaneously in love with two women, both of whom he believes to be dead, one of whom he has never met. [laughter] Again, a sublime aria--I keep using the word because I can't think of an adequate substitute--treats a bizarre situation like the most universal thing in the world.

Trasimede realizes that he has acted rashly in throwing Antigona's picture to the ground, and sends a page to retrieve it. The page returns with a picture, but through some unexplained error, it is not the picture of Antigona but of Admeto. Trasimede looks at it in disgust and laments in a lovely aria that for one born to misfortune even a painted happiness is denied.

He sends the page off with the picture of Admeto, which the page carelessly drops by the wayside at the very moment, as luck would have it, when Antigona happens by.

She finds the picture and raises it to her lips just in time to be seen by Alceste who has arrived almost simultaneously, still in warlike garb. Alceste indignantly demands to know the identity of this unknown woman who is passionately kissing the picture of her husband. Antigona replies that she is a plaything of fate whose destiny flickers like a trembling star--an irresistible metaphor for a coloratura aria, which of course follows.

Alceste tries to reassure herself. After all, the sight of an unknown woman raising her husband's picture to her lips is not conclusive proof that her husband has been unfaithful. The picture might well have been stolen, but whatever the case, the second act must be concluded, which she does in a state of eager expectancy to find out the truth, and a glorious affirmation that whatever the truth may be, her own love will not alter.

And so it continues. I simply wanted to give you a taste of its strange blend of the ridiculous and the sublime.



Crawford: I'd hoped that you would do that.

Pippin: Looking back, I think that *Admeto* was an unfortunate choice to begin the series, because many people surely thought I was making fun of Handel's operas. As Anna Russell protested, "I'm not making this up!" In fact, I was compared to both Anna Russell and Victor Borge--comparisons that I hope and trust are misleading.

Crawford: It wasn't your intent.

Pippin: Well, I can't claim to be *entirely* innocent. I do believe that a frank, good-natured approach to the absurdities of the plot does no damage to the grandeur of the music, which ultimately prevails. To pretend that elements of this particular plot are *not* absurd is to disregard the elephant in the living room.

Reviews were mostly unfavorable. They praised both the narration and the performance, but dismissed the opera itself as a curio. If one paid attention only to the story, I'm sure that would be a legitimate conclusion, but clearly I had failed in my intention.

I must admit that I was shocked and dismayed a few weeks later when we presented *Teseo*, our second Handel opera, to an audience less than half the size of what it had been for *Admeto*.

Crawford: Why so small?

Pippin: Wouldn't we all like to know? The audience had seemed to respond enthusiastically and positively to *Admeto*, but maybe people were offended by my supposed irreverence. On the other hand, it *might* have been the weather.

Crawford: Didn't they think it was funny?

Pippin: They certainly laughed appropriately at the narration, and seemed to do so in a friendly spirit. But humor is often mistaken for derision; it's often taken as a put-down. Not at all the impression that I wanted to convey.

The *Admeto* experience convinced me of the importance of a good libretto. Now a prevalent opinion would seem to have it that there is no such thing. All opera libretti are bad. Personally, I tend to be impressed by how good the good ones are. And in the case of Handel, there is an abundance of good libretti to choose from. Of course, one reason why one has the



luxury of concentrating on the quality of the libretto is that the quality of the music is so consistently high.

Crawford: What makes a good libretto?

Pippin: Handel's libretti are quite unlike those of the later, better-known period when the form underwent several huge sea changes. What do I like in Handel's stories? A quality of buoyancy, big, bold colors, larger than life personalities painted by a broad brush, driven by outsized emotions--love, lust, ambition, jealousy, hatred, et cetera. They are almost always about people in high places, people in power, people who can afford to live out their passions, people who have no need to be careful or cautious. People that can shake the foundations of the world around them.

I like libretti that are bold and frankly theatrical. Boundless cruelty and ruthlessness pitted against total innocence and purity. The storyteller's delight! And I like a libretto that has a strong comic element, as the best ones usually do. Though let me add that there is a world of difference between genuine comedy and comedy unintended, which I'm afraid was the case with *Admeto*. And--oh yes! Long before Hollywood, here we meet the obligatory happy ending.

These qualities are amply demonstrated in *Teseo*, which is at least as fantastical, as extravagant, as far removed from ordinary reality as *Admeto*, but it is driven by gigantic passions, rather than lifeless artifices such as the interchange of pictures.

Its central character is not Teseo, the young hero, but Medea, the famed sorceress, now in middle age, ten years after the terrible day that made her famous, the day in which she murdered her two small children, set fire to the fiancée of her unfaithful lover, and poisoned the girl's aged father. All in an effort to get even! Has time mellowed Medea? We are soon to find out. The signs are ominous. She broods, she pines, she languishes, she burns--she is in love again!

Medea's unreciprocated passion for handsome Teseo drives her to ever greater extremes of cruelty and deception. Bear in mind that she has an infinite arsenal of magical resources to call upon. But she is ultimately defeated and exposed. She concludes the opera by riding off into the night in a flaming carriage drawn by winged dragons, hurling curses at the awestruck spectators left behind.

Medea has much in common with Alcina, heroine of a later opera. Like Medea, Alcina is invested with extraordinary magic powers which she uses unscrupulously. Supernaturally beautiful as well as powerful, she takes delight in turning lovers into wild beasts, stones, even waves of the sea after she grows tired of them. And she is extremely fickle. But her fate is far more poignant than Medea's. For she falls in love genuinely, and thus finds herself bereft of her magic powers.

When her love is unrequited and she is rendered helpless, weak, like ordinary mortals, her only wish is to be turned into a sea wave herself, as she has nothing left but tears. Typically, this final aria, one of the most moving of them all, is a dance rhythm, in 12/8 time, a Sicilienne. Baroque never ceases to be buoyant.

The theme of obsessive, passionate and unrequited love is pursued again in *Orlando*, which came next. Orlando, the warrior hero, vanquisher of monsters, ferocious in battle, bred on the flesh and marrow of lions, is himself vanquished by the delicate Princess Angelica and goes mad when she spurns his love.

This all-too-recognizable story is told on a vast scale. The great gold curtain rises to reveal a mountain on top of which Atlas stands, bearing on his shoulders the universe, which revolves slowly. At the foot of the mountain, Zoroastro, the philosopher-magician, is seated on a stone, singing to the stars while contemplating their mystery. The stage is thus set.

Orlando's heart is in turmoil. We can see why when we meet the Princess Angelica, for of all women of all time, Angelica is beyond question the most beautiful, and unfortunately in love with someone else--with Medoro, whose eyes are like the velvet of night, his hair like the halo of an angel.

Orlando's pain and jealousy turn to madness and destruction. He pulls down a building and buries his rival alive. He then pursues Angelica herself and throws her off a cliff, convinced that he has now rid the world of evil.

Zoroastro has observed the awesome spectacle with philosophical detachment. He cannot act until Orlando falls asleep from exhaustion. Whereupon he gestures, and an eagle flies down bearing a golden chalice in its beak. He pours its contents, a celestial balm, over Orlando's face, who now awakens cured, but so overcome by remorse that he is determined to kill himself. Angelica miraculously reappears, stays his

hand and bids him live. And so the opera ends with Orlando off to new battles, off to vanquish new monsters, having overcome the deadliest of them all--his own passion.

I must confess that I ended the narration with a joke. "Gallantly he rides off, cheered on by all, waving a banner that no doubt bears the words 'Make war, not love.'" Oh, yes, I forgot that Medoro and Angelica are both revived in time for the obligatory happy ending.

But I have a strange story to tell about *Orlando*--make of it what you will. While I was preparing it, I was reminded of a friend whom I'd not seen in more than ten years. His name--eerily appropriate--was Chance. I thought of him because his story was strangely similar to Orlando's. He was just out of the army; he was a poet, he fell in love with a girl who rejected him. He became violent and destructive; he tried to burn down the house where she was staying.

He was taken to a mental hospital and was given shock treatment and various experimental drugs, from which he emerged a ghost of his former self. The last I'd heard, he was wandering aimlessly in confusion--like Orlando.

We were starting the first rehearsal. Someone stumbled into the room and quietly took a seat in the back, where he stayed throughout the entire three hours. It was Chance, whom I had not seen for so many years and whom I never saw again.

Crawford: Maybe he knew the story?

Pippin: Perhaps. But how did he know we were doing it? Or that the rehearsal was scheduled for that afternoon? But there he was, silently watching his own story unfold, like the ghost of Orlando himself.

Our Handel repertoire continued to expand throughout the seventies, and eventually included *Xerxes*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Rinaldo*, *Agrippina*, *Imeneo*. *Ariodante* and *Atalanta*. Just a few brief notes about some of them.

Even the textbooks concede that *Xerxes* is a comedy, but for the wrong reason. They point to the tiny role of a comic servant. But the comedy is pervasive. *Xerxes*, the mighty king of Persia, a tyrant whose slightest whim is law, is foiled time and again in his relentless pursuit of Romilda, who is faithfully in love with his brother. Threats, plots and schemes go awry, but finally Romilda gets to marry the man that she wants through a colossal blunder on the part of *Xerxes*.

It's one of Handel's liveliest scores, but with plenty of moments of high passion.

*Giulio Cesare* is perhaps the best known of all of Handel's operas, made so largely by a famous production by the New York City Opera in the sixties--a production that to my mind was a travesty, a desecration. But there is so *much* in each of these operas that they remain impressive even when mutilated, vandalized and distorted.

Crawford: Why a desecration?

Pippin: Two main reasons. For one thing, several key arias were moved around, including the most famous of them all, "*Piangero*," a song of sorrowful resignation sung by Cleopatra at her lowest ebb, facing defeat and humiliation, near the end of the opera. The New York production moved it up to the beginning, when she first meets Caesar and is trying to win him over by coquettishly appealing to his manly sympathy. A ploy! There were several such rearrangements that trivialized the meaning of the music. I believe that nearly half of the arias were omitted entirely.

The second reason is even more serious. The role of Caesar was sung by a bass-baritone, at a pitch one octave lower than written. Granted, casting male roles in Handel is problematical because they were originally written for castrati. Of course, we no longer have castrati, thank goodness.

But castrati were not all that abundant in Handel's day either. It was hardly a tradition handed down from generation to generation. And on the frequent nights that castrati were unavailable, it was his practice to substitute the rich, ample voice of a mezzo-soprano. He would *never* transpose the vocal line down an octave, which plays havoc with the texture and turns coloratura into a muddy rumble.

Some companies use countertenors for such roles. They at least have the advantage of looking the part. But the countertenor voice as I understand it is quite unlike the castrato voice. I would compare a countertenor to a recorder, whereas the castrato would be a trumpet. They were famous for their power, for their extraordinary virtuosity, and their vast dynamic range.

Crawford: So the mezzo would really be much closer?

Pippin: Especially when you have truly wonderful mezzis like Stephanie Friedman. Who could ask for greater virtuosity, or a richer, more expressive tone? Not to mention the profound musicality.

Crawford: I was thinking of Stephanie, yes. Wonderful!

Pippin: But Stephanie was not alone. Vicky Van Dewark, Wendy Hillhouse, Andrea Baker, Miriam Abramowitsch, and more recently Margaret Lisi, Elspeth Franks and Lisa Van der Ploeg--all of them were remarkable. And so much is demanded of a Baroque singer! Aside from the incredible technical demands, they have to be so creative. After all, they are expected not only to sing the notes but to extemporize and elaborate on the written text as well.

Crawford: What were some of the other operas that you performed?

Pippin: For me, perhaps the most touching of them all is *Imeneo*. The story is slender, for once easy to summarize: the heroine must choose between the man that she loves and the man to whom she owes an enormous debt of gratitude. A more down-to-earth conflict than usual. She agonizes, she vacillates, she even goes mad, though it's not quite clear how much is real, how much pretended. But in the end she yields to duty, to her father's wishes, to the weight of public opinion. She follows her conscience rather than her heart, and so the lightest of Handel's operas winds up being the saddest, the only one I know that ends with a chorus sung in sorrow.

Crawford: Hardly a comedy?

Pippin: No, though it certainly has comic touches, and there are times where you feel it can go one way or another. But we are approaching two of my favorite comedies, two that could hardly be more contrasting.

*Agrippina* is set in the Imperial Palace of Ancient Rome, and is all about skullduggery in high places. The question: who is to become the next emperor? Pity the poor contestant pitted against Agrippina, the present empress and an ambitious mother who sees a golden opportunity for her docile son, young Nero. Nor is she above murder to achieve her goal.

The contest, however, winds up less melodramatically as a seduction scene in Poppea's bedroom where three men are present --two of them hastily secreted behind screens. The cast also includes the present emperor, Agrippina's henpecked husband, who has to remind himself that he is after all ruler of the entire civilized world.



This opera, incidentally, was Handel's first to be performed in London, where it was so fabulously successful that he remained in London for the rest of his life.

Arcadia, the scene of *Atalanta*, is about as far away from imperial Rome as you can get. A land where the woods are greener, the skies bluer, the waters more transparent than anywhere else in the known universe. A place where springtime is eternal and there is inexhaustible leisure for love, and where a shepherd is more than apt to be a king in disguise. The rustic life, or at any rate the sort of rusticity so admired by Marie Antoinette. The opera was specially commissioned to celebrate a royal wedding, so of course it had to contain nothing that would dampen or disturb the festive mood.

Crawford: What a variety of subject matter!

Pippin: That's only the beginning. After all, he wrote about forty operas. We've done fifteen of them.

Crawford: What was involved in doing the orchestral reductions?

Pippin: What we played was not a reduction. I went straight to the Handel Gesellschaft edition, xeroxing the score, then cutting and pasting parts. It's a lot of labor, but much the biggest labor was that of shaping the narrations--paring and pruning, working for clarity and succinctness.

Crawford: How did you deal with the libretti? Did you read them many times?

Pippin: Exposure and repetition, those are the passwords. The stylized language is not easy to grasp, and the stories often need to be simplified for the sake of coherence. They tend to go all over the place and at times become a virtual labyrinth.

Crawford: Why do you think people are drawn to Handel? Does it relate to a need for form and order?

Pippin: Handel's operas can be wild! I think people are drawn to their manifest beauty and greatness. My own desire was simply to make them live by performing them as best I could with the means at my disposal. What good is a buried treasure if it remains buried?

I am sure that some staunch Handelians object to the way I did them, to the way I continue to do them, and I don't claim to have reached the ideal. But I think one should be wary of



approaching such a vital art with a Bible Belt mentality. That is to say, becoming attached to the letter at the expense of the spirit. Authenticity is an admirable goal, but I'm skeptical as to how close we can get to it. Laurence Olivier described his film of *Hamlet* as a "take" on *Hamlet*. So be it. *Hamlet* survives.

Crawford: So Handel will survive?

Pippin: I suspect that he will long outlive Pippin. [laughter]

But we were coming to the end of the seventies; it was time for me to be moving on. My new interest in translation and especially in doing full-length operas in English had begun to take first place.

Crawford: Do you want to save that for our next session?

Pippin: It's certainly another chapter.

[Interview 5: February 5, 1997] ##

Crawford: I thought the casting for *Abduction from the Seraglio* last Sunday was ideal.

Pippin: Wasn't our Constanza wonderful? Elin Carlson is a real find. She lives in Los Angeles, but auditioned for me here at my house a year ago. The audition came late, though, and the roles she was suited for had already been cast. I asked her to come back in the fall when we hold general auditions in a larger space, and where with someone else at the piano I can sit back and listen better, along with several other carefully selected judges, most of whom also sing for Pocket Opera.

Crawford: So your own singers are judging the new singers?

Pippin: Yes, and let me add that singers are the most maligned people in the world. Far from being spiteful, petty and capricious, most of them are generous, considerate and dedicated to the art. And all of them go into raptures at the sound of a glorious voice, even when the glorious voice comes from the throat of another.

When Elin sang, the judges were bowled over. I asked her on the spot to do the role--an excruciatingly difficult one, incidentally--if she was free and if she was willing to make the many necessary drives up from L.A. for the meager amount of money that we were able to pay. She replied that she did have

another commitment about that time, with Columbia, as a matter of fact, but might be able to rearrange some dates.

She called me up the very next day and said that if we were serious about asking her, she would be happy to accept. I could hardly believe our good luck. And something else even more surprising: Sunday afternoon was her first performance in a soprano role.

Crawford: Is that right? I saw that she'd been in Germany quite a bit, but I didn't notice the roles she's been doing.

Pippin: *Cats*. [laughter] Until recently, she was a mezzo, which is more surprising yet, because the role of Constanza is painfully high, even for most sopranos.

Crawford: Has her voice brightened?

Pippin: She said that she had recently discovered the high notes. Where does one go looking, I wonder? With any luck at all, she should have an international career. We talked about this briefly on Sunday. I said, "I'm afraid we're not going to keep you for very long." She replied, "I'll always have time to return to work with people I like to work with." We'll see!

Crawford: She sounds very sensible.

Pippin: She also said that she's had the time of her life these past three weeks. However, one can say things like this in all sincerity, but life takes its own course. Faced with the choice of Pocket Opera or the Vienna State Opera, I'm not 100 percent sure that Pocket Opera would prevail. [laughter]

Crawford: When we talk more about translation, I'd like to go into that particular translation. There were some lines that you appeared to be lip-synching. Were you overhauling the libretto in your mind?

Pippin: I'm afraid I do this unconsciously. I don't intend to, and I'm not aware of doing it.

Crawford: Well, shall we move on from Handel to Verdi, and go through the repertoire more fully? I think your first translation was *King for a Day*.

Pippin: The first full-length. I had begun to do Handel in the early seventies, which was the same time that I was concentrating on both French and Italian. Though my main object in both languages was simply to read and understand the written

language, one is bound to be drawn to the sheer sound, especially when the language is linked with music.

So in order to hear the spoken language I listened to a lot of lively recordings of plays by Molière, Racine, Beaumarchais, et cetera, made by the Comedie Française. With Italian, there is no such theatrical tradition on record that I'm aware of, so I turned to opera instead. Almost every night for several months I would listen to an Italian opera with libretto in hand, following the words very closely.

Oh, yes, I bought a shortwave radio, thinking how nice it would be to turn the dial and hear programs from Paris and Rome. What I learned was that contacting such distant places was like exploring for extraterrestrial intelligence. My supreme achievement was reaching Modesto.

Up to that time I was rather ignorant of opera. My interests have always tended to be intense and sharply focused, which is both an asset and a liability. Concentration is necessary and productive, but it means leaving things out. The result is a narrow, limited range of vision, but it seems to be the way I have to work.

As a musician, for a long time I was primarily interested in music for piano solo. Later, it was chamber music. During the Old Spaghetti Factory days, it was anything that could be incorporated into the Sunday Night Concerts--by no means a narrow territory. But for several decades, there was no room for opera--or so I thought.

So, although I attended the opera occasionally and had listened to opera on the radio when I was very young, it had not become a major interest until I started to listen to these recordings in the early seventies. I became acquainted, then enamored with the operas of Verdi, Donizetti, Rossini, Bellini and Puccini--the five great Italian giants. I had translated a few one-act operas. Why not take the plunge and try a full-length?

I thought it best to start with an opera that was little known. An opera that one was not likely to encounter elsewhere. One of the operas that I had listened to and found completely captivating was Verdi's *King for a Day*.

Crawford: Did you have a recording of it?

Pippin: A marvelous recording made for Italian radio with a stellar cast that caught the spirit perfectly.

Crawford: Who was in it?

Pippin: The excellent conductor was Alfredo Simonetto and the cast included well-known stars like Renato Capecchi, Sesto Bruscantini and Lina Pagliughi. The result was a total delight.

Oddly enough, when *King for a Day* was first performed--it was the second opera in Verdi's career, incidentally--it was a fiasco, greeted by boos, hisses, contempt and scathing reviews. So total was the disaster that it almost ended his career. His disgust and discouragement silenced him for a couple of years. The story goes that he was then inveigled, lured into doing *Nabucco*, which evidently stirred the smoldering ashes.

Crawford: Why was it so badly received?

Pippin: God only knows. Perhaps the audience didn't like the prima donna. Maybe the theatre was too hot or too cold. Hostile cliques rife with jealousy seem to have been rampant in the world of opera--cliques that were adept at stirring up a storm. A good many of our most beloved operas have met with a chilly response at their first performance, though I would guess that few have provoked such raging hostility as *King for a Day*. And as a result, of course, people were scared away from it for over a hundred years. [laughter] Subsequent performances were immediately canceled. Certainly Verdi never witnessed a second performance.

But lo and behold, it's a thoroughly charming, delightful opera, full of bubbling, energetic, Verdiesque melodies from beginning to end, and with comic characters and situations that are really funny. The plot is clear-cut though rather compressed.

Indeed, the need for compression is a frequent problem with opera libretti, which I think are so often unfairly criticized and ridiculed. Usually I marvel at the skillful way they are put together. By now I've translated forty-seven full-length operas, and with only one exception I have emerged from the process in a state of almost reverent admiration.

Crawford: What was the one exception?

Pippin: Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot*, which I called *No Love Allowed*. Wagner wrote the libretto himself. [laughter]

Crawford: You have said that part of that respect is based on what they achieved with so little room for explanation.

Pippin: Yes, a libretto, at least in the good old days, had to be precisely formed with no excess luggage, with almost rigid requirements for the spacing of ensembles, solos, duets, finales, et cetera, each of which must highlight a dramatic point. No explaining allowed! [laughter] After all, who goes to opera to hear explanations being sung? That is the reason why the plots sometimes seem absurd. The librettist is not allowed the five hundred pages with which a novelist can clarify, justify, amplify.

Well, it may be that the plot compression in *King for a Day* made it a bit hard for that first audience to follow. When we did it, I tried to help out with a short speech that introduced the characters, laid out the basic situation, and got the audience somewhat acclimated to what was going to happen. This is a practice that I've continued over the years, but only when it seemed helpful or necessary--that is to say, most of the time. I've always made a point of sticking close to the purpose--no extraneous history, no digression, no rambling.

Three duets for two bass-baritones mark pivotal points in the action. A crusty, hot-tempered old baron is trying to marry off his niece, Giulietta, to an obsequious, self-satisfied old treasurer who has used his position to obvious advantage.

At the beginning of the opera the baron and the treasurer are the best of friends. One might almost think that they were the couple getting married. They have a deal going that is to the mutual advantage of both: the treasurer will get the family's fine old name and the baron will get the treasurer's fine new wealth.

Everyone in the castle, where it all takes place, is geared up to celebrate the wedding festivities, with two exceptions: Giulietta, the bride, and Edward, the treasurer's nephew with whom she is in love. Oh, it was a sad day for opera when it was decided that a woman could choose for herself! [laughter]

Oddly, the king of Poland is on hand for the festivities. But we are soon let in on the secret: he is not the king, but a debonair army cavalier impersonating the king. This in fact is based on an historical episode, where the real king of Poland, in order to make an escape, crept out of the country incognito, leaving his proxy or double behind. The cavalier is under oath not to reveal his true identity, but things get complicated when his own sweetheart shows up.



Nonetheless, the cavalier delights in his new role, and decides to use his newly acquired prestige to spread a little happiness--kings could do worse. So he takes on the cause of the young lovers. Accurately sizing up the treasurer, he sees that the way to break off the engagement is to offer the treasurer a better deal, which the treasurer willingly and instantly accepts.

Unfortunately, this requires breaking the news to the hotheaded baron that his niece, Giulietta, is no longer in the running. The result, a second duet that runs the gamut from courtly courtesy to hissing and snarling. While the treasurer is vainly trying to placate the baron with flattery, the baron is raging at a velocity that only Italians can achieve.

Their third duet comes in the second and final act when the conflict comes to a boil. The baron has challenged the treasurer to a duel, but the treasurer is to choose the weapon. He comes up with an ingenious choice: two loaded powder kegs. They are to sit on the powder kegs while the fuses are lighted. The first to go off loses the duel. This puts a quick damper on the baron's enthusiasm for a fight. And so forth and so forth. [laughter]

Crawford: Finding two bass-baritones must have been difficult.

Pippin: Ordinarily, yes. But we had acquired a remarkable roster of singers over the years, including a pair of baritones that could not have been better matched: Walter Matthes as the blustery baron and Marvin Klebe as the fawning treasurer. We also had a wonderfully expressive prima donna, a born Violetta, in Sylvia Davis, and a spectacularly dynamic mezzo, Suzanne Lake, as the endangered niece.

It's an opera that works especially well in translation, because the characters are clearly and broadly drawn. Their words should sound natural, of course, but they don't have to sound realistic--after all, not many people go around talking in rhymed verse. You can have fun with it.

Crawford: What about the orchestration?

Pippin: Well, that was a problem. I had no idea where to get an orchestral score. Later on I found out a good deal more about locating scores, but at this point I had only a piano/vocal score and the recording, from which I could get some hints. I made my own transcription for a small orchestra consisting of trumpet, clarinet, flute, violin and cello, with piano, of



course. In deference to the Old Spaghetti Factory we named it The New Ravioli Philharmonic.

It worked well as a sextet for winds, strings and piano--not a sumptuous sound, but well-suited for comedy: light, transparent, colorful, with each instrument getting its fair share of solos.

Our first performance, in August of '75, was a great success, followed by spectacular reviews. But high drama came with the second performance. Three days beforehand, the tenor called to say that he had been in a car accident a week or so earlier. He was okay, but still confined to his bed. Singing was out of the question. I thought it would have been nice if he had called me sooner [laughter] but I wasn't about to criticize him under the circumstances.

Crawford: He probably hoped that he could perform.

Pippin: You're absolutely right. In cases like this, sickness or accident, singers never let you know till the last minute because they keep hoping for a miracle. But by Thursday, I suppose he had faced the fact that the miracle was not going to occur.

So I got on the phone right away and started calling up tenors. I phoned every tenor that I knew, including some that I really shuddered for fear they might accept. [laughter] But as I continued to phone, I was becoming less and less fussy.

In those days, replacing a singer was much simpler than it is today because the singers all performed using scores. There was no staging other than what the singers improvised, and we performed on such a small stage there was little opportunity for moving around even if they had so wished. I liked it this way! I wanted the performance to focus on words and music, on characterization and interaction, on sheer intensity of presence and conviction--I suppose like a movie that is filmed entirely in closeups.

Well, getting back to replacing the tenor. [laughter] We had scheduled a brush-up rehearsal on Saturday morning for the performance the next night. Still no tenor. I set out for the rehearsal with nothing but blind faith, and precious little of that.

We had already started the rehearsal when someone came in with a message that a tenor was on the phone--someone I'd never even heard. He said, well, yes, he could do the performance.

I said, "Can you make the rehearsal? We're just starting." So he hopped on a bus, arrived half an hour later, and sight read his way through the part. He taped the rehearsal, took the score home with him, and to end the story, he gave quite a creditable performance. I was grateful that he could give any performance at all, but this was far better than I had any right to expect.

Crawford: He sang from a score?

Pippin: As did all the others. And he did it very well. But there was more drama to come. The performance was to start at 8:30. I'd anticipated a big crowd, but nothing like the droves of people that lined up at the door. By 7:30, an hour before we were to start, every seat was taken, and standees filled every available square foot. Miraculously, all the singers were there, too, as was the orchestra. Why wait till 8:30? Let's go! [laughter]

As we were about to do so, I was informed of two gentlemen who had showed up at the door--an hour early, mind you--and identified themselves as *New York Times*. Well, there was not a square inch of space that they could squeeze into. We meekly suggested that they stand just outside the door, but this is hardly the treatment to which the *New York Times* is accustomed. [laughter] I don't believe they stayed, and that was the last time the *New York Times* has attempted to come to a Pocket Opera performance.

At any rate, *King for a Day*, unlike what it did for Verdi, got us off to a rousing start. And at the age of fifty, I was decisively embarked on a new and totally unexpected career. All afire, I was eager to follow it up with Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. Now *Don Pasquale* was an easier choice than *King for a Day*. It has made its mark. It is an acknowledged masterpiece, though I think it's an even greater masterpiece than is ordinarily acknowledged. Donizetti at his most inspired. Almost his last opera, as you know.

Crawford: How many?

Pippin: Over sixty. But among that long list, there are relatively few comic operas, which is unfortunate, because this is where he truly excels. Aside from *Don Pasquale*, the main two are *The Elixir of Love* and *The Daughter of the Regiment*. Much as I like both of these, I think that *Don Pasquale* outshines them musically. Donizetti appears to have been an expert craftsman from the start. Nonetheless, his art steadily grew and matured until the end of his career at the ripe old age of forty-six,

followed by five gruesome, nightmarish years of paralysis and silence.

##

Pippin: An easier choice, as I said, but one that raises the troublesome question, "Why us? What can we give that couldn't be done better elsewhere?"

So we were put to the test. Whether through sheer singing, through musical and dramatic vitality, through a more intimate contact with the audience, and through the added value of a translation geared to clarity, vigor and musicality--whether we could compensate for the things that we could *not* offer: a full orchestra, the atmospherics provided by an imaginative setting, lively staging. In short, production values.

I must admit that at the first performance we got off to a bad start. For one thing, our Pasquale, Walter Matthes, who had been so splendid as the baron in *King for a Day*, had a severe case of laryngitis. This was a most unfortunate tendency of his that happened a number of times, just before a performance. This was the worst of all. He could barely make a sound.

Crawford: Was laryngitis the result of stage fright?

Pippin: Certainly the result of anxiety. And after it has happened once, you fear that it can happen again. It becomes a nightmare. It's like an inexplicable memory lapse in playing something on the piano that you know perfectly well. Knowing that it can happen at any time, the more you fear it, the more you can be sure that it really will happen. A truly vicious circle.

A performance is like the difference between walking on a narrow path and walking on the same narrow path with a five hundred-foot drop below you on either side.

But we had another problem as well. The young tenor who had come through so valiantly in *King for a Day* was asked to do the part of Ernesto, the tenor lead in *Don Pasquale*. For some reason or other--I have no clue--his attitude this time was quite different: detached, disinterested, disdainful. He hardly bothered to learn his part, though he had far more time, needless to say, than with *King for a Day*. Evidently a troubled young man. I found out more of this later on.

Extremely handsome, he had been idolized at college only a year before. A singer and actor, he was the star of the campus. This can be fatal! I think that he was just beginning to be hit by the contrast between the protected environment where he was automatically given the leading roles and the cold, cruel world outside. He soon afterwards went to New York, where I presume his difficulties increased. I heard that he was into drugs and not long afterwards died of an overdose, or possibly suicide.

So the first performance of *Don Pasquale* was not a happy event, with two out of a cast of four distinctly below standard. On the other hand, our Norina, Francesca Howe, was good enough to compensate for almost any other deficiencies. We've had many performances of *Don Pasquale* since then. It has come to feel like a good friend, someone you can always turn to and feel refreshed. In fact, of all the operas in our repertoire, it's probably the one we have done the most. For one thing, a cast of only four makes it ideal for touring.

I should add that the opera also includes a chorus of servants, but the chorus never becomes an integral part of the action, and it is no great loss to dispense with it altogether. So for touring we use four singers and our renamed Pocket Philharmonic, and that's it.

Crawford: Touring?

Pippin: Runouts, for the most part. We've traveled around California, and we've been to Oregon several times--with *La Serva Padrona* (two singers, be it noted) we got as far as Colorado and New Hampshire. But touring is complicated and requires vast organization--not one of our strong suits.

Crawford: But don't you have performances all around the Bay Area?

Pippin: Yes, we're spreading the net and hoping for a wider domain. Contrary to myth, though, the farther away you get from a metropolitan center, the harder it is to draw an audience to opera, especially for an opera that is little known. This year we are making a renewed effort to expand and hoping for the best.

With *Pasquale* I should mention one major discovery. I started out making an orchestra reduction with just a piano/vocal score, as I had done with the Verdi. But I then came across a real orchestral score and quickly found out that Donizetti's orchestration was far better than mine. [laughter]

I still reduced it to five instruments--violin, cello, flute, oboe and clarinet--but having the full score to consult brought my arrangement much closer to the original.

I was still copying everything by hand. It was not till later that I discovered--I am a slow discoverer--that one could actually rent or buy orchestral parts for at least the better-known operas. Though it still meant modifying them considerably for our purposes, this changed my life enormously!

A couple of operas later, we expanded the orchestra from five to eight, now four strings and four winds--flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon. This has remained our standard Pocket Philharmonic, subject to occasional variation--an added trumpet, French horn or percussion when they seemed indispensable. Nineteenth-century opera composers had refined orchestration to a fairly standard procedure that included a good deal of doubling. With just those eight instruments, supported by the piano, one can maintain most of the characteristic colors and have a good, solid, substantial basic sound.

I use the string parts almost intact, aside from sometimes giving a French horn melody to the cello. The flute part switches to piccolo on occasion, or fills in a chord when needed. The bassoon goes back and forth between first and second bassoon, but also takes over a trombone or tuba part, when the bass needs reinforcement. The clarinet part I change a lot. The clarinet is an especially flexible instrument and good for blending. So in addition to its own part, it easily becomes second flute, second oboe, sometimes first bassoon (when the bassoon is otherwise engaged), and occasionally second viola.

Crawford: How long does it take to work out an orchestration?

Pippin: Two or three weeks. The time is greatly shortened by having the actual parts to work from. But I go through the score very carefully, measure by measure, trying to achieve a balance and to cover all the bases. Part of the Pocket Opera credo is that by reducing things to skeletonics, to the essentials, despite the obvious losses, there are compensating gains as well. For example, a solo violin can never sound like an entire violin section, but in the hands of a first rate player, the solo line can become even more compelling, more nuanced, more interesting.

I have always felt a greater affinity for chamber music than for a full symphony orchestra, and so I love the



transparency of the small group. I also enjoy my contribution from the piano, which for the most part is like the egg white added to a baking recipe--without a distinctive taste of its own, but binding the rest together, filling out the texture. Or like the harpsichord in a Baroque ensemble. The piano is especially good at enhancing the rhythm, with a lively, delicately percussive beat. The other instruments carry the top and the bottom. The piano tends to play in the middle, along with the second violin and viola. But I take over the double bass as well.

Crawford: What would that instrumentation be in a full orchestration?

Pippin: All the instruments that I leave out, notably the brass, which are so often used as a kind of sustaining pedal, besides supporting or strengthening the more soloistic instruments. I make copious notes from the score, but in performance I follow my own instincts. For the most part, my role is that of a discreet, unobtrusive servant. But one who is always there when needed!

After *Don Pasquale*, still enamored of Donizetti and Italian comic opera in general, and convinced that comedy was our natural metier, I turned to one of Donizetti's early, little-known comedies. In the original, it's called *L'Ajo nell' Imbarazzo*, which I translated *The Tutor in a Tangle*.

This came eighteen years before *Don Pasquale*. Donizetti's career was not that lengthy, but it reflected a steady growth. *L'Ajo* does not have the individuality and distinction that the riper comedies have, but it's delightful on its own level, with its characteristically Italian qualities of lyricism, brio, and sparkle. And it has a strong story, based on a thoroughly artificial situation, which is fine with me. [laughter]

The given terms should be accepted, like those of a Molière play, based on the fanatical obsession of the leading character, be it a misanthrope, a miser or a religious hypocrite like *Tartuffe*. The obsession of Don Giulio, the domineering father in *L'Ajo nell' Imbarazzo*, is his hatred of women.

He has two grown sons, which might indicate that this hatred was acquired somewhere along the line. One might guess that the former Mrs. Giulio, who is never mentioned, planted the seeds of bitterness. The opera gives no clue. At any rate, Don Giulio is so set against the female sex that he is determined that his two precious sons are to be spared the



contamination of any contact whatsoever with the gender. He has dedicated his life to protecting them.

Needless to say, his efforts go for naught. The comedy derives from his predestined failure, from the way his two sons, aided by the sympathetic but harassed tutor, manage to thwart the unreasonable fanatic and eventually win him over. The elder son is already secretly married and in fact has become a father himself, and his wife is not the sort that allows herself to be discreetly swept under the rug. On the contrary, a bold, independent Italian heroine, on the order of *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, she is determined to take on the old man and have a showdown, as the son cringes in terror.

The tutor of the title role is in the helpless position of the go-between, sympathetic to the young couple, but also terrified of the father, his employer, and above all eager to save his own skin. Guess who saves the day!

I like the libretto, and Donizetti liked it also. In later years he wanted to come back to it, feeling no doubt that he could do a better job. But the job that he did do was nothing to sneeze at.

I have to confess to a major liberty. God forgive me! The second act has no duet for the two young lovers, so, being a romantic at heart, I stole a duet from one of Donizetti's later operas. [laughter] The opera that I stole it from is in fact one of his very last operas, and furthermore a tragedy, named *Caterina Cornaro*, the mood of which is obviously a far cry from that of *L'Ajo*. But love is love, whether in comedy or tragedy. And the duet seemed to blend in seamlessly. Even the key was right. The perfect crime! But one that I don't believe I have repeated. In fact, it was just what the act needed.

Crawford: Love is where you find it.

Pippin: And why suppress it? Well, in a later performance, Allan Ulrich reviewed the opera in the *San Francisco Examiner*, for the most part unfavorably. He dismissed it as early, immature Donizetti, which is not an unfair assessment. But he added, "There is a romantic duet in the second act, which gives great promise of the Donizetti to come." [laughter] You know, I always wanted to phone Allan and tell him how perspicacious he had been. I never did tell him, but maybe I shall one of these days. I think he would get a quiet satisfaction in knowing that he had accurately picked out this one example of the riper things to come.

Crawford: That's a grand story.





Donald Pippin performing at Opus One in the 1950s.

*Photos by Carolyn Mason Jones.*





Audiences at the hungry i Bach, Beer and Beethoven Concerts and at Opus One.

*Photos by Carolyn Mason Jones.*







Laurel Rice, soprano; Francesca Howe, soprano; Robert Tate, tenor, in Pocket Opera's performance of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*, 1985.

*Photo courtesy Pocket Opera.*





Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* with Donna Petersen and Roderick Gomez,  
Pocket Opera, 1995.

*Photo by Larry Merkle.*





Tim Campbell (Orpheus) and Marla Kavanaugh (Eurydice) in *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Offenbach. Pocket Opera, 1999.

*Photo by Robert Shomler.*







William Gorton (Earl of Leicester) and Ellen Kerrigan (Mary Stuart) in Donizetti's *Mary Stuart*. Pocket Opera, 1999.

*Photo by Laurel Vaughan.*



## V POCKET OPERA IS BORN: 1977

*Getting Management: Samira Baroody and Peter Jacoby; English Versions and Literalism: Examples from Così; New Territory: La Cenerentola, The Rake's Progress and Stiffelio, 1979; The Importance of Elegant, Evocative Shabbiness and New Venues: The Little Fox, On Broadway, Alcazar and Other Theatres; First Off-Broadway Seasons, 1980; More about English versions: The Two Widows; Donizetti, Bel Canto, Cuts and Maria Callas; Pocket Opera Discovers Offenbach, 1981; Grand and Tragic Themes to Gush Over: Luisa Miller, Lucia di Lammermoor, Eugene Onegin*

Pippin: Life moves on. At this point, Pocket Opera was born.

Crawford: How did it come to pass?

Pippin: The year is 1977, the twenty-fifth anniversary of my concerts in North Beach. Robert Commanday, the leading critic at the *Chronicle* and a strong supporter, got excited about it and wrote a very nice long article about my unusual career. We gave a special twenty-fifth anniversary performance of *Giulio Cesare*, besides a retrospective program.

As a result of all this, somebody sent me in the mail a form from the California Arts Council, and with the form was the suggestion, "Why don't you apply for a grant?" At the time we were doing some touring with our one-act operas and, more ambitiously, with an occasional Handel. Lee McRae was handling it. Do you know Lee?

Crawford: Very well.

Pippin: A lovely person. She struggled valiantly to get engagements for us. We were then going under a name that I thoroughly disliked, even though I had come up with it myself: Opera Concertante. But our purpose was to do opera in English and to get away from this kind of high-flown pseudo-elegance.

At any rate, the form from the CAC arrived, an application for touring money. It asked just one question, "Why do you need the money?" and left four lines--just four lines!--for the answer. It even stipulated, "Do not add anything further." Well, this was unbelievably refreshing! Though generally I have a horror of filling out forms, this was one I thought even I could handle. [laughter] My debut at grant writing! But there was one catch: to receive a grant you had to be incorporated.

Crawford: Nonprofit, or was it something else?

Pippin: You had to be a nonprofit. Peter Mezey, who took weekly piano lessons with me, was a lawyer much interested in Pocket Opera--in what soon became Pocket Opera--and he told me how easy it was to form a corporation. We needed three people to form a board, and that was it. So Peter plus another pupil, a magnificent flamenco dancer named Eloisa Vasquez, and a close friend named Gwyn Sullivan became president, vice president and secretary. Lo, we were incorporated!

Crawford: How did you get the name Pocket Opera?

Pippin: The term had been used by Paul Hertelendy, in a review of *Don Pasquale* in the *Oakland Tribune*. "This pocket opera version," said he. The words leapt out. I liked the name--apt, down to earth, easy to remember, certainly a vast improvement over Opera Concertante. So *voilà*, Pocket Opera sprang to life! I sent in my four-line request to the CAC, and wonder of wonders, I asked for six thousand dollars, the maximum, and got six thousand dollars.

Crawford: Oh, that's rare. They liked your four lines a lot.

Pippin: I would have been willing to put it in the form of a haiku. [laughter] I should add that by the next year we had acquired a general manager, Peter Jacoby, who took over such things as grant applications.

He also received a grant form from the CAC. Jerry Brown, no longer governor, had been replaced by a bureaucracy which proved its mettle by coming up with a form consisting of thirty-five pages. The first question was, "What is the goal of your organization?" A full page was provided for a detailed answer. The second page, "State the purpose of your organization." Another full page for another detailed answer. Then, "What does your organization hope to accomplish?" And so forth and so forth. The same question put in a dozen different

ways, each of them requiring some variation, I presume, of the original answer.

It would seem that grant-writing is the art of spinning out infinite verbiage. And with four lines I had shot my wad!  
[laughter]

Crawford: You didn't apply again?

Pippin: No, but Peter and later managers did. We continued to get CAC grants, but the funds were so pared down and the process so laborious and time-consuming, that to get a grant you had to spend as much money as you were hoping to get. Still, they say, the prestige was worth it. Under Reagan, the Council was so reduced that they gave out no funds whatever, but limited themselves to giving out advice. This was known as "trimming the fat."

Thus Pocket Opera was born. Birth enabled us to do more touring, as the six thousand dollars, I believe, came in the form of a matching fund. It meant, in effect, that people could engage us for half the price.

About this time, Samira Baroody entered the picture, an important event. She had attended a performance, had loved it, and spontaneously called to ask if there was anything she could do to be of help. She continued to be supportive in every possible way, and it was through her prodding and encouragement that we decided to do our first full opera season in the summer of '78.

By a full opera season I mean an opera every Sunday night for sixteen weeks. The original plan was for twelve weeks, but because it was so successful we added four more. Bear in mind that our repertoire at this point was small, to put it mildly. There were the three operas I had translated, *King for a Day*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Tutor in a Tangle*, plus Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which of course I didn't have to translate. To inaugurate the season I did a new translation of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, which was by far my most ambitious project to date. Luckily, we had a good many Handel operas to draw on.

Samira stepped in and took charge. She had grasped immediately what Pocket Opera was about and warmly embraced the concept--Lord, I hate that word! Her enthusiasm was boundless, as were her resources of energy and commitment that went with it. She turned her home into an office and got us a manager, Peter Jacoby. Certainly at first they were working gratis. I'm not sure at what point, if ever, they were paid.



Crawford: Labor of love.

Pippin: A labor of love. Well, also a labor of hope. I think especially Peter believed that Pocket Opera could some day flower financially. We are still waiting for the day!  
[laughter]

##

Crawford: Was Pocket Opera ever self-sufficient?

Pippin: Oddly enough, in the early days you might say that it was, but bear in mind that singers were paid either twenty-five or thirty dollars a performance, a fee that included all rehearsal time, all preparation time. Call it twenty-five cents an hour. And this was towards the end of a decade of rampant inflation! The orchestra players were paid at the same rate, thanks to a union that was cooperative, to put it mildly. So Pocket Opera's self-sufficiency was due almost entirely to the generous contribution of singers and players.

Towards the end of the year, Peter and Samira got a grant that was given specifically to allow me a salary of seven thousand dollars a year--my first salary in eighteen years. They themselves were working for little or nothing. Oh, yes, we were self-sufficient! [laughter]

Crawford: Could you have continued on this level?

Pippin: Certainly I could have continued indefinitely, or so I thought. In fact, it gave me greater financial stability than I had known in my entire adult life. But of course that was not the reason. I had found my calling! I knew now what I wanted to do! The opera performances that had been scattered through the years had been wonderfully ebullient experiences, and the idea of regular performances week after week was like stepping into paradise. And that was just what the summer felt like, way up in the clouds, one of the happiest periods of my life.

Crawford: And full time, I'll bet.

Pippin: Very much so. I handled the tickets, incidentally. [laughter] My favorite job! Orders were sent to my home address. The plan was to cordon off one hundred and twenty-five of the best seats for advance sale. But we also wanted to save a certain number of seats for people who showed up at the door. My job was simply to mail out one hundred and twenty-five tickets for each performance. And I loved every minute of it! After all

the years of uncertainty as to how many people would show up for a performance!

Incidentally, this led to an unforeseen complication. As I told you, we reserved the central part of the room, first come, first served, for people that ordered tickets in advance. Those that came at the last minute got the side seats, but often these people would arrive at 5:30 for a 7:30 performance. We didn't want them to have to stand in line for two hours, so we would allow them to stake a claim to a seat and then they were free to go off and have dinner.

The rather confusing result was that the reserved seats were unreserved but the unreserved seats were reserved. Some people found this difficult to grasp. [laughter] All in all, a lovely summer!

Crawford: How did you put your week together? The rehearsal schedule must have been rigorous.

Pippin: There were daily rehearsals, of course. But bear in mind, the way we presented opera in those days was far simpler than now. As I've said before, singers were singing from scores, and there was little premeditated staging, only what the singers improvised. Virtually all of our principal singers were expert musicians--another way in which singers are often maligned. Rehearsals were focused almost entirely on the music. From the beginning, Pocket Opera has attracted dedicated artists. We were able to start out with a group of extraordinarily gifted singers.

Crawford: Would you like to name some of them?

Pippin: I certainly would. Our opening production was *Così fan tutte*, with Francesca Howe, who by that time was sort of our house soprano. [laughter]

Crawford: She was, wasn't she? A fine Fiordiligi.

Pippin: One of her many roles with us. Stephanie Friedman and Vicky Van Dewark alternated as Dorabella. We were giving a number of performances, and neither was free for all of them. Marvin Klebe and Walter Matthes alternated as Don Alfonso for the same reason. Elwood Thornton was a wonderful Gulglielmo and Diane Gilfether was an ideal Despina. You couldn't have asked for a cast of finer singers or finer musicians.

Whether all of them would have been equally fine in an enormous opera house is another question--a place where the

size of the voice seems to outweigh almost every other consideration, like subtlety, musicality, nuance, inflection and word-coloring. But my bias is all too evident.

With *Così* I again faced the problem I had with *Don Pasquale*, but the problem seemed even more blatant: with an opera so frequently presented by the finest companies, so frequently recorded by the finest artists, how dare we presume? And why?

So I took the bull by the horns with an introductory speech, noting that Pocket Opera up to this point had done mostly operas that were never done by anyone else, and that until surprisingly recently we could have made the same claim for *Così fan tutte*. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, *Così* was considered too indecent for public consumption and it says much about the moral fiber of our ancestors that this did not make it an instant hit.

But times change, and lo and behold, *Così* was now one of the most popular and beloved of all operas, and frequently performed by "the other company in town"--my pet name for the San Francisco Opera.

The unavoidable question was bound to arise: should they attempt it? The answer: by all means, yes! Despite the many disadvantages they were laboring under. And the conclusion: go hear them, go see them, enjoy them, but judge them on their own terms.

Crawford: There was a real message here.

Pippin: Well, the audience had no trouble getting the joke. [laughter] And the message evidently got across, because people decidedly did judge us on our own terms, and *Così* was our biggest success yet.

The opening performance was reviewed by Alfred Frankenstein in the *Chronicle*. Although it was a highly favorable review for all concerned, his major point was how insufferably hot the room was and how tortuous it was to sit there for three hours on the hard, straight chairs, and how only people with the utmost stamina should risk it.

Crawford: But he knew that by then, didn't he?

Pippin: Well, no, actually he didn't. Because he had not been to one of our performances in more than fifteen years. But the truth is that his description of the rigors and discomforts of the

room were all too well founded. And it says a lot about the stamina of our audiences that kept coming back for more punishment.

Crawford: It's amazing that you didn't lose any singers.

Pippin: We did not, and I'll tell you why. The audiences may have been uncomfortable, they may have been near collapse, but they were the most alert, responsive audiences one could possibly ask for. You have no idea what this does for singer or player alike. Pass out? Collapse? Not on your life!

Crawford: I notice in your printed libretti that you never refer to them as translations. Why?

Pippin: Because that really is *not* quite what they are. A translation means just that--a literal, word-for-word account of exactly what the original is saying. Although this is important, it is not the *first* concern of an opera translator. His primary duty is to the music, to find words that fit the exact pattern of the music. It means going at it backwards: the composer was presumably inspired by the original words to create a melody.

The translator starts with the melody and then hunts for the words that will do it justice, words that will clothe it in garments not unworthy. It is my hope and intention to express the meaning of an aria or ensemble as a *whole*, but not line for line, word for word. I call them English *versions*. I've thought of calling them *interpretations*, but fear that this might suggest a more radical departure from the original than I intend.

Crawford: Did anyone inspire you along these lines?

Pippin: Yes. W. H. Auden became interested in the subject toward the latter part of his career and wrote an extended essay in which he made a strong case for these principles.

Crawford: I take it, then, that you admire his translations?

Pippin: I like his *principles*, but I really don't like the way he applied them. I've studied two of his translations, *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, and to my great surprise found them painfully literary, high-flown, artificial--just the qualities I would have expected him to avoid like the plague. He frequently made what I consider an egregious mistake. Instead of "translating" an aria, he would substitute a lyric poem, a subjective meditation on the feeling of the moment.

For example, near the end of *Don Giovanni*, Donna Elvira, in the midst of raging coloratura, is made to pursue a subtle, intricately reasoned speculation on the nature of hurt and betrayal. This is supposed to be drama!

My conclusion is that there is a basic difference between writing poetry and writing lyrics to be sung. Lyrics are *not* poetry. They seldom reach for the unusual, distinctive, unique, original word. They go rather for the conventional, easily understood, *expected* word: tender care, fatal card, manly stride, et cetera. Let the music take over.

For a model, I would look to some of the modern masters of musical theatre: Ira Gershwin, Sondheim, Cole Porter, Hart, Hammerstein, et cetera. They prove that it can be done, with words that are simple, direct and moving. Or witty and clever, as the case may be.

I like what Ira Gershwin said, to the effect that cliché and common daily speech, used with the utmost economy and finesse, are what lyrics are made of. Simple and precise, the arrow directed straight at the target.

Crawford: Could you give me an example?

Pippin: Oh, dear! I hate to hold up any single one as a model, but here is a sample that might illustrate the difference between literalism and a translation that *must* fit the music. From *Così fan tutte*, Despina, the worldly wise servant, advises the two sisters who are grieving over their absent lovers:

(literal)

Believe a man? Trust a soldier?  
Expect for love to last?  
Believe a man, and look for  
love to last?  
Trust a soldier, and look for  
love to last?  
Heaven help us, you're living  
in the past!

In men, in soldiers  
You hope for fidelity?  
Good heavens, don't  
let anyone hear you!

Men are identical, birds of  
a feather.  
Ever in motion, April leaves  
fluttering,  
Waves of the ocean,  
Even the weather  
Turns less than a man.

Men are all alike;  
Fluttering leaves  
And inconstant winds  
Have more stability.



Vows of fidelity,  
 Rapturous gazes,  
 Flowers and flattery,  
 Warmed-over phrases,  
 These are their standard fare  
 Since time began.

Pretended tears,  
 False glances,  
 Deceptive promises,  
 Charming lies,  
 These are their favorite  
 tricks.

All they see in us  
 Is their own reflection;  
 Soon as they win us  
 They turn their affection.  
 Kindness and pity  
 Are notions taboo.  
 Sooner is sympathy  
 Found in a zoo.

They only use us for  
 their pleasure; then  
 they despise us and  
 deny any affection.  
 Expect no pity from  
 these monsters.

Men are no good,  
     but come ladies, repay it!  
 Master the rules of the game  
     as they play it.  
 Shame on the girl who is simple  
     and true!  
 Do unto them as they do unto you.

Men are evil and  
     indiscreet.  
 Come, let's pay them  
     back with the same  
     coin.  
 Let's make love for  
     convenience, for  
     vanity.

Love is a holiday over by dark.  
 Follow the leader and love is a lark.

As you can see, the literal translation is dull and lifeless. The translator has to reinvent, using the tools of his own language. You may notice that the English uses a lot more words than the Italian. That is because English words tend to be shorter, *but* we have to keep the same number of syllables. So that means more words! But this is the golden opportunity-- to clarify, to expand, to invigorate. And much as one envies the obvious musical qualities of Italian, English has the edge in agility, vigor, and variety of color.

Even before that first season was over, Samira, Peter and I were all heated up to start the next. But we faced one small obstacle: we'd used up all our repertory. We had shot our bolt. We had had it. [laughter] There was no time to lose. I had to get to work.

I had three new operas in mind for the new season: Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Verdi's *Stiffelio*, and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. The Rossini was a natural. It was well within the bounds of what we had shown we could do well,



especially with Stephanie Friedman on hand, who had been so wonderful in many Handel roles, and who was indeed sensational as Cinderella. But both the Verdi and the Stravinsky were decidedly pushing the limits.

In subsequent years, I have continued to shy away from twentieth-century opera, largely because the orchestration is usually so dependent on orchestral *color* which cannot be reduced to a chamber group. But I hoped that *The Rake's Progress* would prove an exception, because of its eighteenth-century affinities. It is perhaps my favorite twentieth-century opera. Stravinsky would hardly have frowned on transcription *per se*, as he had done any number of them himself.

I followed the original orchestration as closely as possible, but had to make a few important changes. For example, the bordello scene calls for an extended trumpet solo which I gave to the saxophone, an instrument that many clarinetists can handle. The substitution was dictated by necessity, but in fact the saxophone suggested the sleazy atmosphere of the bordello even better than the trumpet.

Another reason for choosing *The Rake's Progress* was less starry-eyed: I wanted an opera that I didn't have to translate! I could see doing two new translations for the coming season, but not three. But if I envisioned *The Rake's Progress* as a timesaver, I was sorely misled. It was far more difficult than any opera I had worked on previously. And furthermore, because I didn't have orchestra parts, I copied them out by hand from a miniature score--the most laborious task I have ever undertaken. Laborious, yet interesting. By the end of it, I felt at least that I knew the opera quite well.

Crawford: You couldn't get the parts?

Pippin: I didn't even know how to go about getting them. And perhaps I didn't want to know, as renting or buying them would have cost money that we simply didn't have. I daresay I was like the deaf person that hears only what he wants to hear.

Aside from the copying, the preparation of *The Rake* was difficult but rewarding. We were extremely lucky to have both Baker Peeples and John Trout appearing with Pocket Opera for the first time as Tom Rakewell and Nick Shadow. Baker has continued with us ever since, as one of our most treasured singers. John left the area the following year, and I've not been in touch with him since. This so often happens when people go away!

For some time, I had been hankering to translate a serious opera. I knew by now that Pocket Opera was fine for comedy, but I wanted to test the deeper waters, and the opera that appealed to me the most was Verdi's *Stiffelio*. It has recently been revived by the Met and hailed as a rediscovered masterpiece, but that was fifteen years later. In '79, it was practically unheard of, and for a peculiar reason. Verdi himself revised the opera and renamed it *Aroldo*.

One would assume that *Aroldo* is a riper version of *Stiffelio*, and that if it were a question of performing either, one would naturally choose *Aroldo*. As for *Stiffelio*, the score was long thought to be destroyed or lost. But as so often happens, the very qualities that were objectionable to its first audiences tend to make it all the more interesting to audiences a hundred and fifty years later.

*Stiffelio* was a failure when first presented because Italian audiences at the time were unwilling to accept the premise of a priest who is married, a priest who has an adulterous wife, a priest who demands a divorce, and--most astonishing of all--a priest who forgives her for her adultery instead of killing his rival.

Though too much for Italian audiences to swallow, this clearly has the makings of grand opera--the conflict between the priest's natural hurt, his sense of betrayal, his jealousy, his anger, all of which are given full play, and his larger conscience as a Christian, which eventually prevails. In fact, the opera ends with a reading from the Bible, the story of the woman taken in adultery: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

Lina, the erring wife who has soon regretted her terrible mistake and implored to be forgiven, has taken an odd step: she accepts his demand for a divorce in order to confront him as an equal, which she can do only when the marriage bond has been discarded. You modern wives, take note! Very Ibsen-esque!

Crawford: Did he transplant the story to some other place when he revised it?

Pippin: Certainly to another place in time. The hero is returning from one of the crusades!

Crawford: Something like the Italians not being able to accept regicide in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, isn't it?

Pippin: Right, indeed. It had to be safely distanced. So what did Verdi do with *Aroldo*? He kept most of the basic story, but split the hero in two, as it were, and gave his conscience to his companion, a spiritual adviser.

It was a deathblow! Fatal to the drama. Furthermore, the ending is postponed till twenty years later--a miraculously coincidental reunion following a scene on a boat, a storm at sea, an accident and a rescue. All highly operatic, but operatic in the worst sense, at the expense of credibility and coherence.

So I was drawn to *Stiffelio* rather than *Aroldo*. Much of the music is identical, but there were places that Verdi changed or rewrote entirely, and in changing he improved them.

For example, in the second act, Lina, the adulterous wife, is having her own spiritual crisis. She realizes what she's done to her husband and regards the episode as a fit of madness that she must atone for. And so she visits the graveyard at night where her mother lies buried, to commune with her mother's spirit. A similar scene takes place in *Aroldo*, but Verdi has rewritten the music. The new music is more tortured, darker, a truer reflection of her inner turmoil.

Likewise, at the end of the first act, when Stiffelio realizes the betrayal, realizes that his wife has actually given the ring that he gave her to someone else, he sings an impassioned aria. I greatly prefer the aria from *Aroldo* to that from *Stiffelio*. In short, what I came out with was basically *Stiffelio* with a few transplants from *Aroldo* that seemed to express Verdi's riper thoughts.

Crawford: It had never been done before.

Pippin: No, and it's never been done since. I presume that the Met stuck close to *Stiffelio*. But I would stand up for my version.

The real challenge was to do a translation that was entirely serious, without a trace of comedy. You know that nineteenth-century libretti--comic, romantic or tragic--invariably are written in verse, meaning rhymed verse. This is relatively easy to do in Italian, because Italian is a very rhyme-y language.

Crawford: All those feminine endings.

Pippin: All of those feminine endings and all of those verb endings. If you end a line with a participle, there's your rhyme. If

you end a line with a verb, there's your rhyme. This has its good side and its bad side, the good being that the rhyme happens almost inconspicuously. It's built into the language. It feels natural. Incidentally, that's the way rhyme ought to be used in English as well, but it's oh, so much harder!

In English, rhyme is a far more powerful weapon than in either French or Italian. Or to change metaphors, it is an herb that should be used in discreet quantities. The use of rhyme overpowers every other flavor! Now the good side of this is that rhyme can be used in English to very striking effect, especially for comic effect, which it is not likely to have in French or Italian. There, rhyme can be melodious, it can be lyrical, it can be apt, but it can also be bland.

Crawford: Molière used rhyme.

Pippin: Yes, and Molière's lines are wonderfully lively, but it's not the rhyme that makes them so. The rhymes give them shape and equilibrium.

In *Stiffelio*, leaning hard on the original, I used rhyme much more abundantly than I would have later on. The effort was to make the rhymes, particularly the feminine rhymes, not sound comic. Participles are useful, words like attended and befriended, parted and started, et cetera, which no one could accuse of being hilariously funny. But were I to rewrite it, as I would like to do someday, I would delete many of the rhymes, for the sake of simple dramatic utterance.

But heaven knows, rhyme is not the only pitfall to be avoided. One bleak day, I listed some of the adjectives that I most dread being assailed with: turgid, bombastic, pompous, inflated, stilted, grandiose, ponderous, fancy. The battle goes on!

Crawford: What about *Rigoletto*, which is so tragic--how did you handle that?

Pippin: *Rigoletto* is certainly tragic, but not all of it is grim and gloomy. The Duke's opening aria, "Questa e quella," in my version, "Does it matter that love is the game I live to play?"--would sound perfectly at home in a comic opera. I think it quite legitimate to give it all the brio and liveliness of light verse that you can muster. Its sinister implications are revealed later on.

Crawford: What about the tragic parts?

Pippin: There you try to do them full justice, with words that resonate, words that are vocal, words that are evocative, but also words that sound direct and spontaneous. One tries to catch the tone of each scene. For example, when the Duke, romantic yet cynical at the same time, woos Gilda, I do fall back on rhyme to make the wooing sound more formal and mellifluous, less sincere:

(literal)

Soul of the universe,  
Love holds the center,  
A secret garden,  
Few dare to enter.

Love is the sun of the soul,  
Love is life,  
Its voice the beat of our  
hearts.

Love is transcendent,  
A halo of glory--  
The rest is shadow,  
A mere passing story.

Fame, glory, power, throne  
Are mere human, fragile  
things.

Close to divinity,  
Ours is the portal  
That opens paradise,  
The mystery of life immortal.

One thing alone is divine:  
Love that brings us closest  
to the angels!

There, that should impress a naive, sentimental teenager, don't you think? Yet I suspect that the deceitful Duke *almost* believes it.

Crawford: How did *Stiffelio* turn out?

Pippin: Well, our serious operas have almost been more controversial than the others. *Stiffelio* was reviewed by several critics, most of whom appreciated it as vital, significant drama, and hailed it as a major discovery. All of them were bowled over by Kaaren Erickson's performance as the remorseful wife, her Pocket Opera debut. I hear some comment from those who think it a mistake for us to attempt grand opera on this level, but they are balanced by those who find them inspiring and revelatory.

Crawford: Which on balance do you prefer?

Pippin: No question, comedy is more fun to write. But romance and tragedy are where the soul of opera lies! I've come more and more to lean in this direction.

My sense of the possibilities, the importance of opera in English was not an instant revelation. Starting with comedy,



it gradually broadened and deepened, along with my respect for these overblown dramas with their outmoded theatrical conventions and often quaint codes of morality.

But human passions remain the same over the course of the centuries, even if in art, at any rate, they constantly crop up wearing new and different disguises. And every work of art or literature, I believe, should be approached in its own particular setting of time and place, there to discover its universality--be it Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Bach or Titian.

As for opera, where else, in theatre or life, do people let go with such total lack of inhibition, holding back nothing? This is the glory of opera, life in its fullest color. Beside their operatic counterparts, even King Lear, Othello and Lady Macbeth are soft-spoken. What would happen if we were all suddenly free of all reticence and restraint, and simultaneously endowed with musical genius? For the answer, go to the opera!

What woman would not yearn to speak with the voice of Donna Anna, Fiordiligi, or Susanna? What man would not yearn for that of Figaro or Don Giovanni? It's not enough to know merely what their words mean. In order to resonate, the words must be those that you use yourself, part of your own daily language, part of the fabric of your own life.

The word is the core at the center of the music, the seed from which it sprouted. "In the beginning...." Unimportant? I don't think so. But language has its problems.

Crawford: Such as?

Pippin: Oh, yes, do let me tell you about my problems! [laughter] Part of the trouble lies in the original. As in Handel, the language tends to be florid and convoluted. I can't swear how Italians would react to it. It may seem more natural to them than to me, a foreigner.

Take the word order, for example. Let me read you a not untypical specimen. "Here night and day the lion of St. Mark keeps constant watch over the fate of Venice." Oh, fine. Now in the original language the word order is this: "Here watches constantly night and day over Venice the fate of, of St. Mark the lion." [laughter]

Crawford: That's very interesting. Do you think an Italian audience would be able to make sense out of that?



Pippin: They must be used to it, because that is the conventional order. And yet from what I've read of Italian prose, they use for the most part the same word order that we would consider natural.

Crawford: Are there some librettists that are clearer?

Pippin: Not that I know of. No, the sentence that I quoted is thoroughly typical.

Crawford: Some say Boito enhanced the Shakespeare version of *Otello*.

Pippin: I've not yet looked at either of the Boito translations all that closely, but I'm skeptical. I seriously doubt that any mortal man could improve on Shakespeare. No question, though, he did a masterful job in cutting and reshaping the play. A libretto has to be far shorter than a play, to allow time for the music to spread its wings.

Crawford: Is there a librettist that you consider far above the rest?

Pippin: Well, I think that Da Ponte was marvelous. He used the inverted language to some extent, but always with elegance. Trying to find words that are comparable can be heartbreaking. I've tried my hand at all three of them--*Così*, *Marriage of Figaro*, and *Don Giovanni*.

But let me get back to my story. Come '79, both Peter and Samira had been pressuring me for nearly a year to leave the Old Spaghetti Factory. Pressure came from plenty of other sources, too--people who found the discomforts and, by this point, the dilapidation of the Spaghetti Factory intolerable.

I was reluctant to move. Despite the chorus of complaints, I am certain that part of the charm of these early presentations at the OSF was due to the total surprise of the experience, particularly to people who had not attended the previous concerts. To encounter in such a wildly improbable setting performances of truly top-notch caliber. To experience opera almost at one's fingertips, and--I like to think--the revelation of hearing it in words that made it come freshly alive.

The crowds generated their own excitement. I must admit that the only times I enjoy throngs of people jammed together are at my own performances. And I still find the chatter and buzz of an audience before the performance starts my favorite sound in all of nature--sweeter than the murmuring brook.

Was the charm portable? Furthermore, the OSF was home, after all, and had been so for nineteen years. And I was more pessimistic than they about finding an alternative. This pessimism was amply borne out by the next fifteen years, when we were wandering without a home. Wandering in the wilderness, it often seemed.

Crawford: Yes, you've been to a lot of places.

Pippin: Eleven theatres in San Francisco alone, four of which no longer exist and four others that are no longer available. Even when we were lucky enough to land in a suitable place that we really liked--Marines Memorial, the Alcazar, Theatre on the Square--there were huge drawbacks.

These were all commercial theatres, and their managers naturally wanted to rent to a company that intended to use the space seven days a week. They were reluctant to accommodate us for even a single afternoon a week for fear of jeopardizing their chances for a full-time occupant. So even when we had the good fortune of being accepted, it never happened until the last minute, until they had despaired of a suitable alternative. [laughter] Of course, this meant that advance planning and scheduling were impossible, not to mention advance publicity.

Another major drawback: in a commercial theatre we were always at the mercy of the larger company that was performing at the same time. This meant, for one thing, sharing whatever stage set they happened to be using. A few times this worked out to our benefit. Our first season at the On Broadway, we had the good luck of sharing a setting that might have been ordered just for us: simple, elegant, nonspecific, with a nice architectural design. Just the kind of framework that we had always wanted but could never afford.

The same thing happened a year later at the Alcazar. But the reverse happened much more frequently. We often had to perform in a set that was grossly inappropriate. At the Marines Memorial, we were with *Cloud Nine*, a play with a semi-oriental setting, lots of bamboo.

Crawford: The Caryl Churchill play? How bizarre!

Pippin: But the ultimate in bizarreness was reached at the Alcazar, when we shared a stage with a play called *Women Behind Bars*. We did *Der Freischuetz*--that folktale of the German forest--set in a women's penitentiary. Talk about weird concepts! [laughter] We once shared a stage with *Torch Song Trilogy*. We

managed to get the set out of the way, but since they used a revolving stage, getting the set out of the way left us about three feet of performing space.

Crawford: I remember the play. The set was quite striking!

Pippin: It was indeed. The middle scene consisted of a huge bed that covered almost the entire stage. Well, the bed didn't simply disappear. It was rolled around to the backstage, and it was the stage that disappeared. Oh, yes, for us these theatres could be hazardous.

So we left the Old Spaghetti Factory in the summer of '79 in a state of innocence. The first theatre that we moved into was called The Little Fox--one of our theatres that no longer exist. It was a lovely little theatre, but hardly ideal for performing. It was shaped like a shoebox, but placed the wrong way--fewer than ten rows, but each row stretching far to left and right.

It was great for the few that sat in the middle, but for the rest--at any time, half of them were unable to hear. When a singer turned in your direction, you heard beautifully; when the singer turned the other direction, you heard very little. So as I said, one third of the audience was always excluded.

Crawford: Is that why the theatre was discontinued?

Pippin: Oh, I don't think for anything so trivial. [laughter]  
 Seriously, the economics of theatre management are complex and perilous, and the survival rate is not good.

Crawford: Are these all about five hundred-seat theatres?

Pippin: No, no, The Little Fox was only about three hundred. But still, going from two hundred seats at the Old Spaghetti Factory once a week to three hundred seats three times a week was a huge leap.

This was the summer that introduced *The Rake's Progress* and *Stiffelio*, and included *Così* and *Cenerentola*, and three Handels: *Giulio Cesare*, *Alcina* and *Agrippina*.

Mainly because of the awkward seating arrangement, after just the one season we left The Little Fox for the On Broadway, which I much preferred, only a block away. In fact, of all the theatres that we've performed in, this is where I felt most at home.

Unfortunately, it no longer looks at all the way it did then, but in 1980 it had a lovely, faded elegance. Covered with red brocade, to some it suggested a classic nineteenth-century jewel box, to others a bordello. It was located in one of the sleazier parts of North Beach when North Beach was going through one of its sleazier phases. It was upstairs, directly above a popular club that was considered the rock capital of the western world. Through bargaining, we finally prevailed on them not to begin performing until 10:30.

They didn't always keep to the agreement, and when they performed you knew it. Great booms, like something from the netherworld, would make the walls vibrate. These volcanic explosions would send the whole theatre into spasms. Each night around 10:15 I would get nervous. Approaching the end of *Figaro*, as the Count implores the Countess for forgiveness-- what will erupt from below? [laughter]

But even at the On Broadway, our tenure was always chancy. Typically, we could return for another season only if an out-of-town show went bankrupt before reaching San Francisco. For years, in fact, it seemed that our survival was entirely dependent on the failure of others--in the theatre, a fairly safe bet. [laughter]

Samira and Peter and most of the board members were far less enamored of the On Broadway than I was. They hated the neighborhood and thought the theatre rundown and shabby, which I suppose it was.

Crawford: But you like shabby. I remember you said once, "I never want to compromise our shabbiness." [laughter]

Pippin: Did I? Well, no one could reproach us for having done so at the On Broadway. But I found it elegant and evocative as well. At any rate, after two years at the On Broadway we went to the Alcazar, and from there to one place after another.

Crawford: So you've not found the Old Spaghetti Factory of the nineties.

Pippin: Well, I don't think I would want the Old Spaghetti Factory back. [laughter] No, Pocket Opera has changed. We've made our point, and now, though few would accuse us of going in for spectacle, we do pay a lot more attention to staging and production values, and we really need and want the resources of a theatre.

Crawford: And now you're venturing out into suburban areas, some new theatres.

Pippin: Yes, but it has been a mixed bag. I'm afraid that suburbanites are more drawn to extravaganza. We've recently canceled a performance at Dominican College because ticket sales were so sparse.

Crawford: How do you explain that? They have no opera company in Marin, do they?

Pippin: Maybe that's why. But there was a Marin opera company for several years. I suppose they found it rough going, too.

Our failure didn't surprise me altogether, though I was hopeful. But to make something like this go, I think you might have a better chance by doing what we did in Berkeley in the early eighties--a season with six productions. To offer just one is like a cafeteria that displays only one dish. By putting up a display of varied dishes you make each of them look more appealing. You also run the risk of losing your shirt. If it should happen not to work, it could be suicidal. Whereas you can perhaps lose out on one performance and the blow is not lethal.

We have been to the Carriage House at Villa Montalvo in Saratoga for several years, and that's been quite successful. I hear that they have completely renovated the theatre this past year. I've not seen the renovation, but I also hear that they've ruined it, destroyed all its charm. So it goes.

[Interview 6: July 10, 1997] ##

Pippin: I hope that you won't think it contemptible, but I've made some notes.

As I recall, when we broke off, we had finally left the Spaghetti Factory after nineteen years. Not all of that time of course was with Pocket Opera, but with the success of Pocket Opera the pressure was great to move to bigger quarters, to something more like a theatre. I felt that a move would be risky. It was like transplanting a delicate plant. The trouble was, I had no idea *how* delicate it might be. Planted and nurtured at the Old Spaghetti Factory, would it adapt to a new, alien environment?

For one thing, Pocket Opera had evolved on a stage about the size of a kitchen table where there was no room for staging, even if one had so desired. But if singers cannot move, one does not expect them to move and so one concentrates on what they do do, rather than on what they are not doing.



Watching a performance on a real stage, an audience would naturally have different expectations, different demands. People might not be so indulgent. I was leery.

But by this time other people had become involved with Pocket Opera. They had put in much time and energy, and I felt that they had a well-earned vote. They were all for moving.

Crawford: You've spoken about Samira.

Pippin: Yes, Samira Baroody came to one of our first performances as Pocket Opera. I believe it was *Tutor in a Tangle*. She was captivated by the performance and by the basic concept of Pocket Opera, and showed herself eager and willing to help out. She and Peter Jacoby pitched in together, and he became our unofficial manager, on a volunteer basis, because there was virtually no money. It was their work that made our first season possible, in the summer of '78.

The season was a glorious success, exhilarating for all. We were packed to the rafters every single night. I'm not sure how we placated the union, but neither players nor singers were paid for rehearsals, just for performances. Now, twenty years later, that sad fact is still true for our singers.

Despite misgivings, I decided to go along with the tide and, sure enough, the following summer we moved to The Little Fox, an ornately decorated room that suggested a private theatre in a royal palace--a noticeable change from the Old Spaghetti Factory. [laughter] It was embellished, by the way, with trappings that were salvaged from the real Fox Theatre. This was the grand rococo theatre of downtown, unfortunately torn down after a valiant but failed drive to preserve it. Plush chairs, gilded mirrors, scrolls and spirals with ornate filigree. Now torn down as well, or perhaps transformed into a mundane office building. The march of progress.

At the time, incidentally, it was owned by Francis Ford Coppola, whose office was in the building. He never attended a Pocket Opera performance, but I was told that one night, in the middle of *Così fan tutte*, he walked down the center aisle slowly to the front, faced the audience, nodded a few times and went out. Royalty surveys its domain.

Aside from Verdi's *Stiffelio*, the other project for the summer was *The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky, which of course didn't need translation, although I couldn't help thinking that some of Auden's lines could stand a bit of translation into more comprehensible English.



With Baker Peeples, Francesca Howe, John Trout and Margery Tede all superb in the four leading roles, I liked the result enormously, and please don't think I'm going to say that about every opera coming up. There are certainly some that I have liked less than others, and even some performances that left something to be desired. So if I start to gush unremittingly, be patient. There will be a few notes of restraint.  
[laughter]

Crawford: Good, good. Well, I'd like to know what you consider your best successes.

Pippin: They are yet to come. Much as I liked *The Rake*, I would not put it near the top of the list. Maybe Pocket Opera *had* overstepped a bit.

From The Little Fox, leaving Francis Ford Coppola, we moved to the On Broadway--located guess where--and a theatre that I still remember with special fondness. Its atmosphere of faded elegance was very nineteenth-century in character, something that one could imagine in a movie like *Les Enfants du Paradis*.

It seated four hundred people, with a balcony that went all the way around, and it was thoroughly charming, but in a scruffy, run-down neighborhood, surrounded by porno palaces, strip joints and everything else you could, or possibly could not, think of.

Introducing *Così fan tutte*, I noted the opera's scandal-ridden history, where for over a century it was neglected on grounds of indecency, despite unsuccessful efforts to tamper with it, to make the plot more acceptable. But standards have changed. Finally, we can perform *Così fan tutte* without fear of lowering the moral tone of the neighborhood. Big laugh!

Of course, many people objected to the neighborhood. And the old refrain, "When are you going to leave the Old Spaghetti Factory?" became "When are you going to leave the On Broadway?"

Crawford: But they came anyway?

Pippin: They did come. That season at the On Broadway we did three premieres--"premieres" meaning, of course, a first performance for us, and almost always this meant a new translation. Plus nine "revivals." With this vast number of productions it was essential to expand the repertory, and fast!

We started the season with Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, a sparkling comedy with a first act that's practically

perfect. The second act unfortunately loses focus and goes into too many different directions. But the music bubbles throughout.

I was always slightly fearful that we might have some Turks in the audience who would have every right to howl in protest. Pitted against the Italian girl, they do not come off well. The two cultures collide: the hidebound, chauvinistic, barbaric and monumentally stupid Turk--who no doubt has many a prototype in Italy as well, not to mention elsewhere--versus the fearless, liberated and outspoken Italian girl.

It's a curious reversal of the standard rescue motif, as exemplified by many an opera where the brave hero comes to rescue the captive maiden. Note *The Barber of Seville*. Here the girl survives shipwreck and braves danger to rescue the young man from captivity, and succeeds in doing so by twisting the tyrant Turk around her little finger. It ends in their glorious escape.

Crawford: Wouldn't the title role be difficult to cast?

Pippin: Not if you already have the right person! It was just the role for Vicky Van Dewark, who has such an exciting, positive, and clearly focused sound, plus the endless agility that Rossini's music requires. But we were lucky with the other three leads as well: Robert Tate as the captive hero, David Tigner as the overbearing and gullible Mustafa, and Marvin Klebe as the less-than-heroic uncle, her companion.

By this time, I'd made the breakthrough discovery that one could rent orchestral parts. This fact may be of minor interest, but I can't tell you how many weeks, months, years it has added to my life! Up until then, I'd laboriously copied them all out by hand. Adapting the parts to Pocket Opera still required a good deal of work, but nothing like starting from scratch.

Our second premiere remains to this day one of my own particular favorites: Smetana's little-known comic opera, *The Two Widows*, which, like *The Bartered Bride*, seems to embody the very heart and soul of central Europe with its rich folk tradition.

You find it not only in Smetana and Dvořák, but in Brahms and Mahler as well. And here it's harvest time to boot! Life is good, the feast is abundant, and love is in the air--though it takes some curious, unexpected turns before reaching a radiant conclusion. One of the singers broke down in

rehearsal, almost in tears, and said that the music was "achingly beautiful," and so it is.

For this particular opera I took a radical step with the orchestration by turning it into a string quintet, using two violins, viola, and two cellos, with piano, and simply leaving out all the other instruments, which were replaced by the piano. This made the piano part a good deal more prominent than anything I'd ever done before. But the result sounded so like a genuine piece of chamber music, with a warm, rich consistency of texture, that even the other players were surprised to learn that Smetana had intended it for a much larger orchestra.

##

Crawford: Why has *The Two Widows* not become better known?

Pippin: I think partly because it's more effective in a small space. Subtlety, warmth and intimacy are the key words. A spirit of gentle, good-natured fun that conceals a tormented story of forbidden passion! What more could one ask for?

Yet overriding its strong appeal, I think most opera companies would think twice about doing an opera in Czech. Pity the poor singers who would probably have to memorize and mouth it syllable by syllable. Of course, I think it's a great loss that such operas are not performed in English. Not the first time that I've given utterance to this thought.

Crawford: Could you give us a sample lyric?

Pippin: Now isn't that odd? I have one right here. It's from near the beginning, when Carolina, one of the widows, owner of a large estate in rich farmland, introduces herself as a thoroughly happy, supremely contented person:

(literal)

Lady of the land, I reign  
Over field and country,  
Queen of an entire domain,  
Served by all and sundry.

Independently I rule  
my large estate,  
Wielding supreme power  
over all my servants.

Time to sew or time to reap,  
Mow lawns, trim the borders,  
Shoe the horses, shear the sheep,  
I give all the orders.

Whether sewing or reaping,  
My orders are carried out.  
Everything is done  
Just as the great lady  
wishes.

Prima donna of the dairy,  
Autocrat of sty and stable,

I preside, command the harvest,  
Like the goddess Ceres herself.

My cuisine is legendary,  
And my brew a thing  
of fable.

Over stables, fields and forests  
My rule is absolute.

Famous for my bees and honey,  
Healthy flocks and flax  
and linen,  
When the sky's serene  
and sunny,  
I'm the happiest of women.

Far and wide, people praise  
My beehives, my fields of flax,  
My sheep and poultry,  
My model domain.

Who is better off than I?  
Weigh the evidence presented.  
Think it over, then reply:  
Lives there widow more  
contented?

What more could I want?  
Answer me:  
Is there a widow in the world  
Who lives better than I?

At the county fair I star,  
Winning all the glory.  
My displays are best by far  
In each category.

I send my produce  
To the county fairs  
Where everyone praises  
My animals and equipment.

Then my name is in the news,  
Sometimes half a column,  
And I comfort those who lose,  
In words wise and solemn.

I win all the prizes  
Along with much praise;  
The newspapers print my name,  
Spreading the glory.

I complain and pay my taxes,  
Read the journals, duly  
noting  
How the market wanes and  
waxes,  
Ever first in line for voting.

I promptly pay my taxes  
And never fail to vote,  
And like all malcontents  
Keep up with the news.

I speak out on matters local,  
Claim our mayor's but a  
novice  
And the governor a yokel.  
Throw the rascals out of  
office!

I strongly oppose the mayor,  
That old philistine,  
I agitate, I petition,  
Et cetera, et cetera.

Who is better off than I?  
Weigh the evidence presented.  
Think it over, then reply:  
Lives there widow more  
contented?

What more could I want?  
Answer me:  
Is there a widow in the world  
Who lives better than I?

Crawford: [applause] How's your Czech?

Pippin: Nonexistent. Instead, I have a marvelous record jacket that translates into French, German and English. By comparing the three translations I presume that one gets a fairly accurate idea of what the Czech is saying. But let me emphasize again that what I'm doing is not strictly speaking translation, nor should it be, in my opinion.

In a translation of Tolstoi or Flaubert, for example, I would suppose that one tries to get as close to the specific meaning of the original as possible, adding or subtracting nothing. In opera translation, I think that this is not the proper goal, nor even a possible goal. Other considerations greatly outweigh it. I would certainly want the total translation of an aria to reflect what the original is saying, but I do not attempt to match it line for line. A lyric cannot be paraphrased; it must be reinvented, woven out of the material that one's own language provides. I aim for the essence, but clothe it in new garments.

There is one area, though, where one has no freedom whatever. The translator is absolutely bound to the rhythm of the music, nor can he add or subtract a syllable from the original text. Italian presents a special challenge, being blessed with long, mellifluous words. A classic example would be "la primavera," which means "spring." A translator is confronted with four extra syllables which he must use to some effect. But this is the golden opportunity--to say something *about* spring, to clarify, to expand, to illuminate, to create a phrase that will make it more vivid and specific. And this is what is exciting about the process. It demands that you probe, explore, and discover what the opera is all about.

Don't get me wrong. English also has its share of gorgeous, mouth-filling words, but they are usually about the wrong thing: oleomargarine, orange marmalade, wall-to-wall carpeting. Where one truly longs for resonance, for sheer liquid beauty, what do we get? Bliss. Sweet lips. Spring buds. Very frustrating.

Crawford: For you, opera in English is a real cause, is it not?

Pippin: A crusade, no less. And it's taken on the urgency of a fight to preserve an endangered species, as more and more companies turn to supertitles.

Crawford: A distraction?



Pippin: They are certainly better than leaving the audience totally in the dark, but you're right. They are also a distraction. For one thing, in most opera houses your attention is drastically divided between the titles far above and the stage far below. The people on stage, who after all should be of supreme importance, tend to get dwarfed. The words are remote from the people that presumably are uttering them and disconnected from what is actually coming out of their mouths. The actual words become lifeless, or even nonexistent.

Crawford: Certainly composers wanted the words to be meaningful.

Pippin: Absolutely. Verdi, for example, was fanatical about dramatizing the words, often emphasizing this over beauty of voice. Well, I intend to carry on the struggle.

From there we went on to *Anna Bolena*, the first of a Donizetti trilogy on the three queens: Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth, her daughter, and Mary Stuart, Elizabeth's ill-fated rival.

*Anna Bolena* was Donizetti's first big international success, and I would presume the first of his mature operas-- a bold presumption indeed, considering that of the twenty-two full length operas that preceded it, I was familiar with only *The Tutor in a Tangle*. Certainly by this time he had found himself. His form and style had crystallized, though it continued to mature and ripen throughout the thirteen years and thirty-some operas that he completed before his career was tragically cut short.

As a composer, I think that he is generally much underrated. Possibly because no other composer's music is so dependent on the interpreter. It demands the human voice, with its coloring and nuance, its warmth and passion, to bring it to life, to transform what appears to be dross into gold. Donizetti, who wrote almost entirely for the theatre, understood this like a playwright who knows how and when to let the actor take over.

Few composers had his gift for melting lyricism, for expressive and powerful ensembles from which Verdi surely learned a thing or two. And furthermore, he had a strong instinct for what is theatrically effective, and a gift for choosing well-crafted libretti, often taking an active role in shaping them. Some of them I believe he wrote entirely by himself. This takes enormous skill.

Crawford: You have said that librettists are often unfairly criticized.



Pippin: True. I've come away from almost all the libretti I've worked on with nothing less than fervent admiration. The formal demands are so stringent, so precise. But in fact the tightest restrictions often produce the greatest art. Witness the sonnet, the fugue.

But back to *Anna Bolena*. This was the opera with which Maria Callas in Milan singlehandedly, so the report goes, inaugurated a great Donizetti revival in the fifties. I was excited to discover that the performance had been recorded. I turned it on, eager and expectant. What a disappointment!

Not that her singing was bad. But the conductor had no feeling for Donizetti's style, and this must have greatly restricted what she could do. The tempi were all wrong. Quick movements that should have sparkled with verve and vigor were soggy, lugubrious and lifeless. It was hard to imagine how such a performance could have sparked interest. I should think it would have snuffed it out instantly.

Callas must have been supremely impressive as a performer, but I can't imagine that anyone's presence could be so awesome that one could overlook the surrounding musical deficiencies. Fortunately, Beverly Sills made a recording later on that showed how it ought to go. Which goes to show that music really *is* the universal language. [laughter]

Frankly, though, I don't think many opera companies could have offered a stronger cast than ours: Kaaren Erickson at the height of her glory in the title role, Stephanie Friedman, Robert Tate, and in the smaller role of an innocent young page, Lorraine Hunt, later Lorraine Hunt Lieberman. I believe this was her first performance in an opera.

As for what happens in *Anna Bolena*, King Henry VIII, all-powerful and unscrupulous, is eager to find a pretext for getting rid of his vulnerable queen, who interestingly is by no means spotless.

This is contrary to most melodrama. Ordinarily, it is unthinkable for a heroine to be anything less than a goddess on a pedestal, but Donizetti dared show her as a woman. She had indeed sinned, and her original mistake was in putting worldly ambition over love by marrying Henry. Though by now she's had ample opportunity to regret her mistake, she has made her choice and, to Henry's consternation, she is determined to stick with it.

Henry has brought back her former lover on purpose to tempt her, to get her to fall, so that he'll have an excuse to get rid of her--in his own way. Unaware of Henry's conniving, she is nonetheless determined to live up to her obligations as a wife and as a queen. She is not going to have an adulterous relationship, however much her heart longs for it.

So the king sets up a snare that entraps Anna, the lover that she's renounced, and a totally naive, innocent young page, a Cherubino who is in love with her, and who unwittingly betrays Anna with a false confession that he is told will save her.

Crawford: I can just hear your narration.

Pippin: Oh, yes, there is much to tell! [laughter] Another dramatic highlight is when Anna discovers that Jane Seymour, her closest friend, is in fact her potential replacement, a discovery that unfolds in the course of a powerful duet.

Above all, there's the final mad scene where Anna falls apart. Like Lucia, like Ophelia, her scene is full of fragments of the past, but they eventually cohere into an otherworldly tranquility and a simple, discreetly ornamented melody that goes straight to the heart. The melody is *Home, Sweet Home*, thinly disguised and exquisitely set. Who else could have used it so beautifully, so movingly?

Crawford: *Lucia* is a standard in most big houses, yet *Maria Stuarda* and *Anna Bolena* aren't done a lot. Is that because of the demands on the soprano?

Pippin: Well, I doubt that many soprano roles are more demanding than Lucia. But except for *Lucia* and some of his comedies, Donizetti suffered about a hundred years of condescension and neglect. Until that infamous Callas performance! But I believe that more and more of his operas are being rediscovered and reevaluated, thanks largely to recordings.

Here again I become a broken record. A huge opera house is not friendly to the bel canto style, which is subtly nuanced, gracefully ornamented, of the utmost expressiveness and refinement. There are few singers that can achieve this and yet have the power to fill the big spaces. Usually it's one or the other.

Crawford: Yes, after *Anna Bolena* was done last year, someone wrote: "The soprano can belto, but there was no bel canto." [laughter]

Pippin: Well put, but unfortunately the soprano probably had no choice but to belto. Pocket Opera is most fortunate to have Ellen Kerrigan, whose feeling for the style is a constant revelation. She has wonderful floating pianissimi on top, besides a seemingly infinite resource of dynamic variety. Yet I wonder if she could do nearly so much by way of subtle color in the bigger space.

I will concede one flaw in Donizetti, a criticism others have also made and that I think is thoroughly justified. Almost every aria, every ensemble, every duet, on however high a level it begins, reaches a point where it goes into formula, something from a cookie cutter, something that scads of pupils or anybody else for that matter could have supplied with ease. For only a few measures, mind you, but always at the climax.

This consistent weakness I find unfathomable, a single formula mercilessly repeated. Here I have to admit that we take things in hand and do a bit of trimming. The term trimming the fat has never been more apt. [laughter] I also think that one can do no greater service to Donizetti than to shorten some of these mechanically contrived, thoroughly conventional endings. I can't imagine why he didn't break the habit. This may be one reason why he is put down as a composer. Critics look at these endings, recognize the routine mechanism, and then dismiss him as a formulaic composer, ignoring the beauties that went before.

Crawford: Can you be a little more specific about that?

Pippin: *[plays an example, a repeated harmonic pattern]* Look at every single number, about twelve to twenty bars from the end, and you'll find the same pattern.

Crawford: And your soprano doesn't resent your cutting her role?

Pippin: Far from it. They usually insist on it. They can recognize formulas, too. Furthermore, these places are especially wearing on the voice. In fact, most often, they will simply stop singing for a few bars and let the orchestra go it alone. Then they return refreshed for the high note at the end.

Crawford: Do other companies cut in this way?

Pippin: I think most of them do. But some do not, and no doubt consider themselves morally superior. [laughter] I think they are vastly deluded in this particular piety.

Crawford: Isn't that a very time-consuming process, trimming that way instead of making large cuts?

Pippin: Nothing easier, nothing quicker. It's not hard to tell when Donizetti goes into empty repetition. I should add, though, that aside from this we do very little cutting, which brings up a small point of chagrin. Reviewers have said from time to time that our operas are drastically trimmed and cut. Well, they are not! Perhaps we should take it as a tribute--the operas *seem* short!

Crawford: Because they hold the interest.

Pippin: That's right. When you get involved with what's going on, it doesn't drag--it moves along.

So that takes us to the year '81 and three more operas--  
*The Marriage of Figaro*, *La Belle Helene* and *La Vie Parisienne*.

I had approached almost every opera with doubt and trepidation, but none more so than *Figaro*--an opera of universally recognized greatness, well known, to put it mildly, performed frequently by every company on earth, and full of scenes that demand staging. What on earth could we give to it? A new translation, for one thing. My translations had in fact been praised extravagantly, and I hoped that this might be a good enough reason for taking it on. And if for nothing else, I looked forward to the pleasure of spending several months in daily contact with such a radiant masterpiece.

Crawford: Why were you so worried?

Pippin: At that time, our style of presentation was still extremely modest. Simplicity could go no further! From the beginning, Pocket Opera has performed for the most part on small stages. The orchestra is seated onstage, behind the singers. Two rows of players plus a grand piano usually stretch across the entire stage. From the piano, where I conduct the orchestra with head, shoulders, elbows, et cetera, my back is to the singers as well as to the audience.

For the first few years, singers performed on book. We had no stage director. Stage movement and stage groupings were devised entirely by the singers, with me putting in my two cents here and there. Some attempt was made to coordinate dress, but there was no costuming in the theatrical sense. If a stage set was needed, I would simply step forth and describe it--the opulent palace of Mustafa, the haunted fountain in

*Lucia*, the tavern at the opening of *Così*, that changed effortlessly into a garden with a view of the sea.

We made minimal use of props. Literally everything depended on the performance of the music itself and the singers' ability to project words and character and to relate to each other through suggestion.

It had worked well so far, but we were getting into more complicated territory. It was somewhat like adapting a novel into another medium. But I thought that our version of *Figaro* would at least give a view through a different lens, a new way of looking at it without resorting to the drastic reinterpretation and shock treatment that I personally find offensive. Trump Towers indeed!

Well, the faith turned out to be justified, thanks to an extraordinary cast: Kaaren Erickson, our Susanna, did the same role a year or so later with the Met. Francesca Howe was a warmly radiant Countess, though one critic wrote, "I can't believe that the Count would ever grow cold to this woman." Elwood Thornton was imposing, which made him all the more comical as the constantly thwarted Count, and Larry Venza was a delightful Figaro.

Secondary roles were equally outstanding: Donna Petersen and Marcia Hunt (Lorraine Hunt's mother) alternated as Marcellina; Walter Matthes was a blustering Bartolo, William Coburn an unctuous, oily Basilio. What a range of characters this opera does contain! And despite the elements of confusion in the story, it's one of the best libretti ever.

I faced one stumbling block--the overture, which I was tempted to omit altogether, out of deference and trepidation. After all, one of the most famous pieces in the orchestral repertoire. How dare we attempt it with the Pocket Philharmonic? Well, by rare chance, because I almost never turn on the radio, I happened to hear it on the radio played by a group of instruments consisting of a few horns, a couple of tubas and trombones. The most bizarre combination imaginable for this light-winged music, all brass and mostly bass. By George, the overture emerged with all of its energy and sparkle intact. Not at all the sound that one expected, but the novelty if anything added to the delight. And I thought, if they can do it with their instruments, we can do it with ours. And so we did!



Crawford: It has been said that it wasn't until *The Magic Flute* that Mozart could really control his librettist, that Da Ponte kind of ran away with things. Do you have any feeling about that?

Pippin: Well, if what you say is true, I think it may be a good thing that Mozart didn't have control. [laughter]

Crawford: Did he bully Schikaneder?

Pippin: I wish he had bullied him more. Though I don't know. I've not yet gotten that far into *The Magic Flute* libretto, so it may turn out to be more coherent than I think it is. But I doubt that it compares with *Così*, *Figaro*, or *Don Giovanni*.

##

Pippin: From there to *La Belle Helene*. Pocket Opera discovers Offenbach!

*La Belle Helene* was a propitious introduction. It is a divinely comic operetta in an oddly literal sense, because one of its most touchingly comic elements is Helen's ambivalent relationship to the goddess Venus.

Venus, moody and capricious, is in fact the leading comic character, though she does not actually appear. Nonetheless, she dominates the plot, permeates the atmosphere, radiates the stage. And Helen, Queen of Sparta, wife of King Menelaus, is comically helpless in her obviously doomed determination to remain a loyal wife even while caught in the firm grip of Venus' unyielding demands--a rather ponderous way of saying she's in love! With handsome young Prince Paris, no less.

Her dilemma is summed up in her second-act prayer to Venus when she is essentially telling Venus to lay off, to leave her alone. True enough, she has sinned in the past. Rather frequently, in fact. With a blush she recalls the hours of ecstasy, the nights of rapture, but all of it entirely against her will. Venus gave the orders; Venus laid down the law. What could she do but obey? And so the prayer ends, "Venus, what next? Am I just oversexed? [laughter] Venus, for me, go back into the sea. Return to your shell'n leave Helen alone." Well, Venus is not about to take orders from Helen.

Crawford: A mere mortal.

Pippin: Right, indeed. Well, despite the appeal of the story, I had another attack of trepidation. An operetta without spectacle, an operetta without dance, without visual allure, without



lavish costuming? Could it survive solely on the loveliness of the music and on the sparkle of the story itself?

Well, survive it did. And *La Belle Helene* remains not only one of my fondest memories but a harbinger of things to come. Eleven more Offenbach operettas have followed to date.

With *La Belle Helene* I also rediscovered how useful narration can be. All of Offenbach's operettas contain a massive amount of spoken dialogue. His operettas are in fact plays with music. So much so that the long, long dialogue scenes almost dwarf the music. Here the scissors can get a vigorous workout. The dialogue is not only lengthy, but much of it is insipid and dated. Or perhaps it is so quintessentially French that it defies translation.

But with crisp narration one can telescope, compress. Narration also gives an opportunity to slant, to shape and give perspective to the plot, to point up ironies. And you can always retain the dialogue scenes when you want the characters to speak for themselves. A couple of years later when the Lamplighters presented it, the performance of Rosemary Bach as Helen was a revelation. In writing the dialogue, I had no idea how funny it was until I heard her speak it. What a talent! I still don't know how she did it.

Crawford: With Offenbach I suppose you could go crazy with rhyme.

Pippin: With Offenbach rhyme is in its element. Allow me. King Menelaus has just returned from a reluctant trip abroad to find Helen in the arms of Prince Paris. In the sassiest tune imaginable, she turns the situation around and points out how he is the one to blame:

A man if smart  
About to start  
A homeward trip aboard a ship  
Will show good breeding  
Before proceeding  
And send his wife a friendly tip.  
And thus prepared  
A scene is spared  
And she awaits with sighs of bliss.  
In that way can  
The married man  
Receive a fond and tender kiss.

But if perchance  
 With no advance  
 He barges in despite the lock,  
 So impolite,  
 It serves him right  
 If he becomes the laughingstock.  
 The only cure  
 For such a boor  
 Is from the treatment known as shock.  
 So I advise  
 The man that's wise  
 To give at least a gentle knock.

But I want to go back to the fact that Pocket Opera productions at this time were undirected. This might suggest a gaping void. But this was not the case. It meant that the challenge went straight to the singers. And when they are not directed, when they are on their own, they do respond. They take over.

Crawford: I'm not surprised.

Pippin: They know that they have to do the creating themselves, and they love it. They don't have to kowtow to anybody else's concept. They can relate to each other, they can play off each other.

Now, a really fine director will stimulate and use this talent; he will in turn be stimulated by what comes from them. But creativity often doesn't spring to life until it's forced to, or until circumstances demand it. "Necessity is the mother...."

So even though a production like *La Belle Helene* was done with score in hand and with no outside direction, the individual singers, working with each other, contributed so much that the effect was ebullient and contagious.

Crawford: Were all performances done with scores?

Pippin: Without exception. *Figaro*, *Anna Bolena*, all of them.

Crawford: How did that affect the performances?

Pippin: I was more than pleasantly surprised that audiences seemed to accept it immediately. They saw the eyes, they saw the faces, and the fact that the singers were holding scores was immaterial. Many people commented about this, saying that they

themselves were surprised at how quickly they stopped even noticing.

I have to admit, though, that while this was true of our best performers, it did not work with everyone. Some singers used the book as an excuse *not* to perform. This seldom happened in a major role, but even when it happened in a minor role this would be a major distraction. The person buried in the book would be the person noticed. The aching tooth tends to get one's entire attention.

Pocket Opera casts were and still are small enough that every person counts. I also have to admit that when the policy changed, when we decided to drop the books, even though this meant an enormously greater amount of work, singers felt relieved and liberated. I daresay, like a person discarding crutches.

Having broken the ice with *La Belle Helene*, I felt far less trepidation about *La Vie Parisienne*, which followed soon afterwards. A more irresistible piece would be hard to find--literally intoxicating. The centerpiece is a wild, zany party where servants are posing as aristocrats for the benefit of a visiting Swedish baron who is eager to connect with the upper echelons of Parisian society. The party culminates in an extended finale that graphically depicts the progressive stages of intoxication.

In fact, though, I would not have turned again to Offenbach so quickly except for a surprise phone call that I received in early '81. It was from a man named Bob--I forget his last name. He represented the Belwyn Mills Publishing Company. He explained that they were planning to publish the collected operettas of Offenbach with English translations, and that I had been highly recommended.

They wanted me to start out with *La Vie Parisienne*. I don't remember if I even tried to sound nonchalant. I was tickled pink. They gave a rather early deadline, which meant that I had to drop everything and dive into it immediately. Fine. I was all enthusiasm. And I did particularly enjoy the work. So nice to feel wanted. Of course, I met the deadline. And then the waiting game began.

A year or so later I got a second call, complaining that I had copied the text into the wrong edition. It was true. I used a German edition because it was legible, as opposed to the old, crumbled and faded French edition they had given me. I was more tactful in explaining my reason. The notes were the

same, and since it was to be recopied anyway, I didn't see that it made any difference. But no, they insisted that I recopy it into the French edition and get it to them within a week. So of course, I did.

A few months later they phoned in alarm to say that they did not have a typed copy of the translation. They needed it immediately, and it must follow their format: the lyrics should be in capital letters. Weeks after I sent it in, they phoned to complain that my copy was unusable because the lyrics were in capital letters. Would I please make another copy and send it without delay?

Meanwhile, I had met with Bob several times and we had delightful conversations. He was full of enthusiasm about the project and delighted with my work. But he warned me: they would send me a contract and I should have a lawyer look it over. The company's attitude to aspiring lyricists was not philanthropic.

We found a lawyer with a brilliantly creative imagination, who came up with a document that would have made the START treaty look like child's play. Every conceivable contingency that the mind of man could envision was exhaustively explored. This time it was no wonder that months went by before we got a response.

Finally, three years after the initial phone call, I received a copy in the mail of the first two acts for proofreading. The text was exquisitely hand-copied. Two weeks later, I got a brief letter informing me that the project was canceled. They had been unable to locate orchestra parts for one of the five acts. Shortly after that, Bob died, and I suppose that the Offenbach project died with him.

Frustrating, disappointing and sad as the experience had been, at least I got introduced to *La Vie Parisienne*, and that makes up for a lot. As with Donizetti, I would consider Offenbach generally underrated. He had an even greater gift for individual, distinctive melody than Donizetti. And unlike Donizetti, he never fell back on formulas.

Crawford: No cutting necessary?

Pippin: No, Offenbach has done all the cutting himself. In fact, the vocal scores often have asterisked footnotes that say, "This number is skipped in performance."

Crawford: Is it true that he so scandalized the French that he never had the reputation for the quality composer that he was?

Pippin: Oh, the French loved him while he lived--at least they loved him for fifteen years. His last ten years were more problematical. But operetta was generally looked down upon as a secondary form of opera--a viewpoint that was evidently shared by Offenbach himself.

Towards the end of his life, he yearned to leave a more lasting imprint, with a real opera. This goal he amply achieved with *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which he did not quite live to finish. But whether he was aiming high or low, he never ceased to be an artist. He wrote for the theatre, he wrote to entertain, and he never rode on a high horse.

He composed naturally, easily and copiously. I would suppose that the gift of melody tends to be effortless; either one has it or one doesn't. Schubert had it; Verdi had it; Offenbach had it. Shakespeare was sometimes criticized for writing with too much facility, to which it was Mark van Doren who made the reply, "If it were not easy, it would be impossible."

Mozart expressed it vividly, if inelegantly: "I write music the way a sow pisses."

Evidently Offenbach's flow of melody was endless. Rather than revise, he would simply start all over with something new. According to reports, the tenor was unhappy with his aria in the first act of *La Belle Helene*, so Offenbach nonchalantly dashed off three others from which he could choose. [laughter] Offenbach said, "No doubt I shall die with a melody waiting to come out."

Crawford: That's so sad.

Pippin: But can you think of a happier way to die? And to think that *Hoffmann* was composed in the last months, weeks, days of his life.

Crawford: The recitatives were added, weren't they?

Pippin: They were added posthumously, and I think mistakenly. Toward the end, he was drastically enfeebled. He had to be carried from one room to another. But for decades he had endured excruciating, chronic pain, all the while composing some of the most buoyant, effervescent, exhilarating music ever set down on paper.



A program of highlights called "The Pick of the Pockets" ended our second season at the On Broadway. Although I've spoken only of the premieres, bear in mind that each season consisted of twelve or fourteen different operas, most of them rotating from previous seasons. We were a true repertory company, and by this time we had accumulated a considerable repertory. Though far from enough to allow me to slow down.

As I've said, I was particularly fond of the On Broadway, and felt that this was where Pocket Opera belonged. Part of its appeal for me was that it represented almost the opposite of the clichés often associated with opera--lavish, ostentatious, exclusive and snobbish. Perhaps I still had *Les Enfants du Paradis* in mind.

Nonetheless, the pressure was on to leave--and there *were* many valid arguments--and so we moved to the larger Alcazar Theatre. It was a wrenching separation, a giving up of identity, but the move taught me that our identity was not so easily shattered and that we functioned quite effectively under many different circumstances. And the Alcazar was by no means the worst.

Three more premieres: Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Von Flotow's *Martha*. I'm afraid that I'm in greater danger than ever of sounding gushy. I really will get eventually to some of the operas that I like somewhat less. [laughter]

But not with these three. Both *Luisa Miller* and *Lucia* represent Italian romantic-tragic opera at its very best: powerful conflict, well-shaped libretti, firmly drawn characters, inspired music within somewhat conventional boundaries, and in each a highly vulnerable, sympathetic but strong heroine in truly desperate straits. And both of them take a desperate way out. Both operas, in being so moving and so dramatic, make a strong case for opera in English.

By now I was thoroughly convinced that Pocket Opera could and should take on these grand and tragic themes. I was a bit shaken, however, by a small incident a few days before our first performance of *Luisa Miller*. I ran into a very nice lady who worked with the San Francisco Opera. She asked me what we were doing next. I told her. "Wonderful!" she cried. "I'm sure it will be *hilarious*!"

Was this what our audience would expect? The truthful answer is--well, yes. For the most part. No question, we had work to do.



Crawford: Perhaps you can say what kind of person you were looking for for Luisa Miller.

Pippin: Kaaren. [laughs]

Crawford: So she was still here.

Pippin: Yes, but her life was soon to take a new direction. In just a few weeks she was to take first place in one of the most prestigious of European competitions, in Munich. This was to launch her into a much larger career. It was her intense musicality that made her ideal for the role. This musicality was as much in evidence when she "marked"--which she often did in rehearsals--as when she sang full out. Diane Gilfether was also a superb Lucia, a role that, like most coloratura sopranos, she deeply cherished.

Crawford: Would the demands of coloratura be difficult for someone so young?

Pippin: Difficult, I daresay, for a soprano of any age. But here I may be just spouting. I know little or nothing about the mechanics of singing, other than a few obvious precepts. There is no doubt that such a role requires years of training and preparation. But when you are ready for a role, when the time comes to perform it, it has to be easy. I would guess that this applies to all performances. My only first-hand knowledge comes from the piano.

The world of *Martha* is far removed from that of these two tragic heroines. Here the heroine, another coloratura soprano, leads a sheltered life with all the privileges of the high-born: the world is at her feet, she is surrounded with suitors, and she's bored--bored to death. [laughter]

She's looking for something that will touch her heart, although she doesn't quite put it that way; she is unaware that she has a heart to be touched. Nonetheless, she feels a restlessness, a discontent--and *we* know. We know what is missing, as does her good friend Nancy.

On an impulsive visit to Richmond Fair, from this impregnable height she is suddenly plunged down into the crudities of farm life. To her horror, she finds that she has unwittingly hired herself out for a year as a servant girl, and there is no way to get out of the contract.

Of course, her life really starts with this adventure, and she discovers herself. It's a charming story--one that even

George Bernard Shaw gave his rare stamp of approval to--and an even more charming score. Oddly enough for being a German opera, it's full of English rusticity and the flavor of Richmond Fair. A recurrent theme song, coming back in various keys, is the folk song "The Last Rose of Summer," which Martha herself sings at several crucial points, always lovely, always touching.

Crawford: Was there anything thematic about your choosing these heroines?

Pippin: No. I would like to imagine that I had some grand scheme in mind, but no, it's all happenstance. If there is a pattern, I don't find it out till afterwards. But isn't that the way creativity is supposed to work? It starts with throwing things out at random.

Crawford: And *Martha* was well received? Again, it's not often done.

Pippin: Very well indeed. It helps to have singers like Ellen Kerrigan, Baker Peeples, Ed Cohn and Vicky Van Dewark. And such an appealing, tuneful, well-written score! It makes me wonder what on earth happened to von Flotow, because he had a long life and went on to write many other operas--all of them, as far as I know, consigned to oblivion. I've been curious to explore them, but haven't yet gotten around to it.

In *Martha*, not only are there great solos, like the famous tenor aria, but enchanting ensembles as well: a spinning quartet for example; a "good night" quartet; a quartet where the two girls first meet the two farmers at the fair. Not to mention four duets, one of them tender and nostalgic, one tantalizingly romantic, one bitterly passionate. I'm not quite sure how to characterize the fourth!

I've read, incidentally, that Offenbach lent von Flotow a hand with the orchestration. They were good friends. What was the extent of Offenbach's contribution I have no idea, but certainly the orchestration has all the mastery that one would expect of Offenbach, or Donizetti, too, for that matter.

We left the Alcazar in '82 after just one season. It was the same old story that would become even more tiresomely repetitive in the years to come. We were simply not what theatre managers wanted, except as a desperate last resort. In six years we were bounced around to six different theatres.

Fortunately, one of the nicest of them all, the Marines Memorial, was suddenly available, no doubt through someone else's downfall. We opened there with *Eugene Onegin*. Talk

about trepidation! First of all, I have to say that the great Vladimir Nabokov, supreme authority on Russian literature, abhorred the libretto. Wretched and execrable were some of the gentle adjectives that he used. How can I pit my own frail intellect against his? I would sooner take on Goliath.  
[laughter]

But he is absolutely wrong! And his opinion is unfathomable. Perhaps he was put off because the tone and spirit of the opera are very different from that of the Pushkin poem on which it is based. The poem, several hundred pages long, is far more comic and satirical. But taken on its own terms, the opera libretto is one of the most beautiful and moving that can be found anywhere.

Crawford: Did Tchaikovsky do the libretto?

Pippin: He is listed as a collaborator, whatever that means. Though it predated Chekhov by several decades, the Chekhovian atmosphere is striking--an atmosphere that I had presumed to be unique. The pace is leisurely, but it doesn't drag--it floats.

Like Chekhov, so full of love! Love permeates the air. The mother's affection for her two daughters, their affection for each other, Tatiana's closeness to the old nurse, the old general's love for his wife. And the love that's unreciprocated! Lensky's passion for Olga, Tatiana's passion for Onegin, and in the end, ironically, Onegin's passion for Tatiana.

In contrast to them all is Onegin, the hero, who feels nothing, until too late. Arrogant, self-centered, politely condescending. And for Tatiana, irresistible! Tatiana, the dreamer, reaching out. Like so many in Chekhov, she yearns to leave an existence that to most of us would seem idyllic, at least externally, but to them is stagnant, isolated, cut off from the pulse of life.

I come back to the word "intimacy": Tatiana writing her passionate letter to Onegin, Lensky's song before he is killed in the duel, the mother and the old nurse reminiscing together about old times, Olga cheerfully explaining her placid disposition. And the duets: Tatiana and the old nurse, Tatiana and Onegin. These are truly the big moments in the opera. Though there *are* a few spectacular scenes as well. Two big parties.

Crawford: What about the Cossacks?

Pippin: Yes, the Cossacks do appear. They sing from offstage, they march on, but then they are sent right back off. And a chorus of eight good singers can make a most impressive sound.

We were again lucky in casting. Francesca Howe was devastating as Tatiana, well matched by Jeffrey Kearny as Lensky. Donna Petersen was the nurse, Marcia Hunt was the mother. The bass role of the general was sung by Monte Peterson, whose subsequent career I believe has been mostly in Europe.

Surprisingly, although the orchestration has moments of overwhelming richness, most of it is more like chamber music in texture, where the clarity of individual lines compensates at least in part for the less than massive sound. But the play is the thing--so touching, so moving, so real. This I felt we did full justice to.

Crawford: Did you do any staging?

Pippin: Like everything at that time, it was undirected. But that doesn't mean that it was unstaged. Left to their own devices, singers usually figure out what to do. You have said how beautiful it was when sung in Russian, and I agree. Certainly the Russian language has a color that English cannot duplicate. Yet I would rate the virtues of intelligibility, of communication, still higher. Tatiana writing her letter is heart-wrenching, but it is not heart-wrenching if her words have no meaning. And English need not be unbeautiful.

##

Crawford: Do you read Russian?

Pippin: Not at all. But as with Czech, I was working from trilingual translations. The translation into French was the most useful --whether because of the natural grace of the language or because of the skill of the particular translator I don't know.

Crawford: Better than the translation into English?

Pippin: By far.

Crawford: Have you done *Onegin* since?

Pippin: Just once since then. When you feel attached to a former production, particularly with an opera so personal, it's sometimes hard to let go and do it with new faces. Infidelity! But I'm still hoping.

Crawford: So what came next?

Pippin: Donizetti's *Maria Padilla*, another great opera, and almost entirely unknown. It's one of his last operas, and another indication and proof of his steady ripening. I got acquainted with it through an underground recording which I defy anyone to listen to and not be captivated.

A commercial recording came later, with some of the same cast, but it doesn't have nearly the heated excitement of this recorded live performance in London.

The opera has a Spanish coloring, unusual for Donizetti. Not untypically, it also has some powerful duets. For example, an idyllic duet between Maria, the rebellious heroine who dares defy social convention, now reunited with her level-headed, less passionate sister Ines. A curious parallel between Tatiana and her sister Olga, one that eluded me at the time. [laughter] Until this minute, in fact.

There's an even more powerful duet between Maria and her father, a stern man of rigid, military discipline who has gone mad as a result of the humiliation inflicted upon the family by his daughter's flouting of traditional morality. For once, the tenor, not the soprano, has a mad scene! While Maria pleads for forgiveness, he is floating off in his own world, dreaming of the daughter he once knew, unaware that she is there present beside him.

Crawford: It sounds almost Lear-like.

Pippin: Very much so. And the music rises to the dramatic occasion.

Don Pedro, king of Spain, is the reason for Maria's downfall. Having seduced her and promised to marry her, he has taken her with him to his court where they are living in scandalous openness. But much as he is inclined to fulfill his promise, the demands of state, calling for a royal alliance, after all come first.

Crawford: And I thought Pinkerton was the biggest operatic cad!

Pippin: Well, Don Pedro gives him a close runup. And with a lot more dash and flair. However, Don Pedro does eventually capitulate. Maria triumphs! I've read that Donizetti wrestled with several alternative endings. Hollywood prevailed!

Our third new opera of the season was Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and I am still in gushing vein. [laughter]



Another underrated opera, for which one person alone is to blame--Giuseppe Verdi, whose *Falstaff* is undoubtedly superior. But the two operas are quite different, and on its own terms, *The Merry Wives* is a wonderful comic opera, abundantly melodic, every scene a fresh inspiration, and I still have a special affection for it. There's room for both. Alas, Nicolai did not live to write another. He died at the age of thirty-eight, the same year and about the same age that Chopin died.

Crawford: How did it feel, turning from Italian to German?

Pippin: A vast relief! For a very simple reason: the rhythm of German is much closer to that of English. And in lyrics, of course, rhythm is king. The typical Italian rhythm is anapestic--deDAdum, deDAdum. It's hard to string together English words that convincingly fit that pattern. The language of plain speech in English tends to be monosyllabic. The words are short. And the rhythm tends to be iambic: "To be or not to be..." A famous line, converted into Italian rhythm, would have to become: "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow." [laughter]

I remember a line from *Norma*, where Bellini for once does give you the desired rhythm: "Delay would lead to death." Good English! But in the more typical Italian rhythm, you'd have to say something like "To linger here longer is fatal." Let's hope that with work I would come up with something less artificial, less "literary."

Crawford: Something with more dramatic thrust.

Pippin: Exactly. But Italian constantly tempts you into a language that is literary and lifeless because of the rhythm. [added during editing process:] Oh, let me give you one more example, though I forget from which opera. "*Io voglio cantare!*" "I want to sing!" But to preserve the Italian rhythm, which one *must* do, and remain literal, you would have to come with something like, "I am longing to warble!" Try that out as an expression of spontaneous joy. No, I don't think it will quite do. But it does indicate why one has to go sometimes far afield to get back to the *essential* meaning of the original. The work begins!

I must admit that the originals often do sin in precisely the way that I try hardest to avoid, tending to be florid and convoluted, and making the feelings expressed sound inflated and merely theatrical. I try to bring them down to earth by making the language as simple and straightforward as possible. By making rhymed verse as well sound as much as possible like natural speech. [end of insert]



Crawford: So the German was refreshing.

Pippin: Very much so. Ironically, *The Merry Wives* is based on a Shakespeare play, but hardly any of Shakespeare's words fit the musical pattern, though I did find a few. Still, to my amazement, *The Merry Wives* was the first translation that seemed to come easily. A good sign!

For the final opera of the season it was back to Offenbach, but Offenbach with a difference: *La Perichole*, the story of two struggling street singers unable to marry for want of the forty pesos or so required for a license. Bizarre circumstances catapult them into a world of crazy nobility ruled by a viceroy whose passion is to find the ultimate disguise.

Their fortunes take a roller coaster ride from palace to prison and eventually back to the streetcorner where we first met them--but now with considerably more than forty pesos in pocket. It's an endearing story, and musically it is my favorite of them all.

Crawford: Set in Peru?

Pippin: Yes, and like *Maria Padilla*, it has a strong Spanish flavor. It came somewhat later in Offenbach's career, when he was turning to a new style: less parody, more genuine feeling, like the famous letter song where Perichole bids her beloved Piquillo a painful farewell.

Crawford: Let's hear it.

Pippin: Perichole writes a difficult letter:

I adore you, my love, now as ever,  
And for life will that love endure.  
But too long we've struggled together;  
Too long we've been ragged and poor.

No use to deny or delay it--  
The words I must wring from my heart.  
The time has come--how can I say it?--  
Perhaps we'll do better apart.

Can lovers remain fond and tender  
When forced to go hungry to bed?  
Who can embrace in shared surrender  
When craving a morsel of bread?

I am weak and only human.  
I had hoped with my final breath  
To bear out my pledge as a woman,  
My hand in yours unto death....

So our dreams lie torn now in tatters.  
I know it well...what can I do?  
Within my own heart where it matters,  
Forever I'll belong to you.

Oh, my darling, I share your sorrow,  
And can find no words to console.  
Far apart though we be tomorrow,  
Think kindly of your Perichole.

Crawford: Do you want to say who your Perichole was?

Pippin: Indeed I do. Wendy Hillhouse was Perichole, and Baker Peeples was our Piquillo. And with them we took another major step forward: our first production entirely off-book. This was their wish. So let me now do an awkward about-face.

After ardently defending the use of scores in performance, I must admit that abandoning them opened doors that led to an altogether new and different domain, the full implications of which it took me some time to grasp. It certainly led to greater freedom, but with freedom comes the need for a guiding hand. This was when Tom Fleming came into the scene and became our director for several seasons. I soon started to wonder, how had we ever done it without him?

An important landmark that I've passed over completely was the separation from Samira following a clash with the board, and the entrance of Dino Di Donato as our new company manager. She gave so much to the company that she had been so instrumental in starting, and I shall always be grateful to her.

You have no doubt gathered that almost my entire story of the past few decades has been about the work itself, which has indeed been my life. But the story of Pocket Opera, like that of many an opera, is soon to become one of perils and pitfalls, crisis and suspense, a winding road leading--where? What act are we in? [laughter]

Crawford: Well, certainly not the finale.



## VI PERILS AND PITFALLS

[Interview 7: October 8, 1997] ##

*The First Offenbachanalia, 1984; Enter Dino Di Donato; Difficulties with Critics and Bookings; Outings with Jerome Kern and George Gershwin; A Disastrous Second Offenbachanalia; The Waterfront Theatre: Hopes for a Permanent Home; The Loan of Yanked from the Harem; The Waterfront Closes Its Doors; Dark Days and Recovery; Thoughts about Directing; Merola Opera Program Uses Translation of The Secret Marriage; Smooth Sailing at Last: New Homes, New Repertory, New Directions; Thanks, Lists and Lyrics*

Pippin: I don't remember exactly where we stopped. Was I getting my first bicycle? But let's begin with a new venture, a new departure--our first Offenbachanalia. This was the summer of '84.

Up to this point we had done four of Offenbach's full-length operettas and one one-acter. Offenbach was an inexhaustible treasure trove, with about forty full-length operettas and about seventy one-acters. Of these forty, only two or three are performed with any frequency. This does not include *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which is not an operetta but a full-fledged opera.

We had made a start with these four, each of which had been greeted with a chorus of delight. The spirit of Offenbach is so infectious, and it fits so perfectly with the spirit of Pocket Opera. It was the idea of Dino Di Donato, our company manager, to bring the four together for a concentrated season and to call it an Offenbachanalia.

I had first been hesitant at the very idea of doing pared down operetta, a theatre style that was so identified with spectacle, opulence, glamour, gorgeous costumes and all the

trappings of the stage. We were offering skeletonized productions with a small cast, no scenery whatever, no special effects, but relying entirely on the music, the lyrics, the dialogue, the narration, and the talents of the performers. Our trust was put in the right place.

Dino, an enthusiast by nature, was especially rhapsodic about Offenbach. For him it was a discovery, as I'm sure it was for many people, including myself. And he was convinced that an entrepreneur had to take risks.

With characteristic energy, he set about raising funds, and quickly met with disappointment. Answers from likely sources all came back with the same answer, wishing us all the best, but suggesting that we seek funding elsewhere. But where was elsewhere? Ah, inspiration! Our loyal audience, none other. An appeal was sent out, and thus was the Elsewhere Foundation born--consisting of our generous friends and contributors.

The summer season proposed might seem modest, a mere fourteen performances. But for us, fourteen performances in four weeks of one famous but in fact little-known composer was a gigantic leap. We had never before done four performances in a week, and we were about to move into the Herbst Theatre, twice the size of any we had yet performed in. Bear in mind that our nonprofit world was light years away from the world of commercial theatre with its backers and big budgets for promotion.

Like Cinderella going to the ball, we were planning to dress up for the occasion. The operettas were to be fully staged and costumed, not, certainly, in the traditional grandeur, but a considerable advance over the prevailing Pocket Opera style. Dino was determined to raise the performance level by establishing a more polished, consistent look. He commissioned a handsome set, on Shakespearean lines, a basic set which could be altered and decorated to suggest changing times and places. A picture frame, so to speak--nonrepresentational, nonspecific, consisting of arches, doorways and porticoes. The kind of setting that I had always favored. Cal Anderson provided just what we wanted. Unfortunately, though, it was not portable, and migrants that we were, we eventually had to abandon it.

Crawford: Herbst was *large* for Pocket Opera--about nine hundred seats?

Pippin: That's right. Which meant that a lot of tickets had to be sold. A few hours before we opened, Dino called in despair. We had sold only 15 percent for the season. This was alarming.

God knows what it would mean to the future of Pocket Opera if we were to go broke, as appeared likely. Needless to say, there was no money in reserve. I should add that Herbst is an extremely expensive theatre to perform in, which I think is tragic and--I'm trying to think of a synonym for obscene.

Crawford: Well, go ahead. [laughter] Blood money, maybe.

Pippin: That will do. Ironically, it was my understanding that Herbst was a city-run enterprise whose purpose was to be accessible to nonprofit groups like Pocket Opera.

Crawford: Precisely.

Pippin: Instead, it is practically prohibitive. This is puzzling, considering how supportive and generous the city is to the arts in other respects. The Grants for the Arts, for instance. The program that keeps so many of us alive.

We were starting with *La Belle Helene*, an old friend. We had sold only 15 percent of the tickets. Disaster was looming. But that evening the miracle happened. To our amazement, the line at the box office stretched around the block. To such an extent that we were half an hour late in starting--a most agreeable half hour! [laughter] Such a relief! A reprieve from the death penalty. We announced to the audience the reason for the delay and people took it in good stride. The performance was exhilarating, and we got glowing reviews that started us out on a four-week crescendo and accelerando.

The big hit of the season was *La Vie Parisienne*. Over the years, we've done several productions of this operetta--both before and since--but none that seemed to capture so perfectly its special quality of delirious exuberance. Chemistry is a mysterious thing.

The season also included *The Bridge of Sighs*, an almost totally unknown operetta set in Venice, a parody of Gothic horror, and the epitome of Offenbach lunacy and gaiety. It's one of my own favorites. Here I go again! [laughter]

Crawford: Do you want to talk a little bit about the person who staged the works?

Pippin: I mentioned Tom Fleming. Dino found him, and struck gold. Tom was a marvel--quiet, intelligent, quick, precise and efficient. Like Dino, his background was in theatre and literature rather than music. He had a deep love of language and was sympathetic to the Pocket Opera lean approach, aiming



for elegance through simplicity, suggestion rather than elaboration. Intent on cleaning away excess and clutter so that the work at hand could speak for itself. Tom left us a couple of years later. He got a job in Hollywood. Not a glamorous job, he said, but I teased him about it--selling out to Hollywood!

But his departure was a great loss. He worked with so little fuss and made things happen so easily that it threw us a bit off balance. It gave me the deluded notion that it really *was* easy. Our later directors all required more rehearsal time. It took several seasons for us to find a comfortable working relationship--a comfort that I had mistakenly taken for granted because of Tom.

Enthusiasm created by the Offenbachanalia carried over into the new season at the Theatre on the Square, another new and fairly large theatre. How could we start with anything but Offenbach? We opened there the following February with *The Bandits*, another relatively unknown operetta and one of his most elaborate. It had been performed originally with a cast of three hundred! Even Pocket Opera succumbed to the lure of grandiosity with an unprecedented, record-shattering cast of nineteen.

Imagine, four separate casts colliding! The notorious bandits, envoys from the Spanish court, envoys from the Mantuan court, and the staff of a deluxe hotel located on the border of Spain and Italy. Think *that* one over! [laughter] Excessively modest of the French, don't you think? Quite a handful for nineteen to manage, but that became part of the fun.

The other offerings of that spring season were *Mary Stuart*, my favorite of the Donizetti trilogy about the three Tudor-Stuart queens, and also Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, another story about bandits.

Crawford: Whoever did you get to sing Mary?

Pippin: Ellen Kerrigan, an inspiration, as always. Stephanie Friedman was our anguished, indecisive Queen Elizabeth, equally inspiring. I listened to a tape of the performance not too long ago, twelve years later, and was again dazzled by the high quality of the singing, by the expressiveness of the words, by their mastery of the bel canto style.

Crawford: Do you have tapes of most of your performances?

Pippin: Of quite a few. In those days station KQED was taping them regularly and they were being broadcast. In fact, we were told that we had an estimated audience of between ten and twelve thousand people a showing. Ironically, this meant that we had a larger audience than the big opera house, which was not being broadcast.

Crawford: How did it come about?

Pippin: Simply because someone at KQED who liked Pocket Opera became interested. But after a few seasons KQED underwent a radical change of policy, eliminating practically all music, not only live music but recorded music as well. We've never been broadcast since.

In all candor, I was not entirely happy with the tapes. Some qualities came through well, but to get a good balance and blend takes a lot of doing, as I'm sure any recording company would be quick to point out. We didn't have the time or the equipment.

*Fra Diavolo* was next in line. Now, I've promised that I'm not going to rave about all of our operas [laughter] and I would not rave about *Fra Diavolo* as great music. It's very agreeable music, and Mozart summed it up well in speaking of another composer: if you want music that is merely entertaining or pleasurable, you could do no better. But if you want music that goes further, music that shows depth, profundity or striking individuality, you have to look elsewhere.

This judicious critique brings to mind one of my pet grievances. There seems to be a school of critics that enjoy knocking down idols, and they've chosen Mozart of all people. They gleefully claim that his sometimes sharp criticism of other composers was based on petty spite and jealousy. These critics should check out what he said about Haydn, or about Handel, about J. S. Bach, about Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach...

Crawford: All gods.

Pippin: Yes, and every single one of them he revered and praised without stint. The composers that he did put down--in presumably private letters to his father--were the ones that we acknowledge now to be second-rate. In short, he was giving voice to judgments that posterity has confirmed. Petty, forsooth!

Getting back to *Fra Diavolo*, it is not the greatest opera or operetta, but it's a great show. Though, in fact, the

original story is not all that great. I was lucky. I happened to come across a German version that changed the original story considerably and improved it enormously, giving it the missing ingredients that it needed. It tightened the plot, clarified the characterizations, and even gave the story a surprise ending. This was more or less the version that I translated, and in some quarters I was given credit for having at last given *Fra Diavolo* a worthwhile libretto. I trust you not to divulge my secret. [laughter]

Crawford: Has anyone used it since?

Pippin: A few times. But summer was again approaching, and a second Offenbachanalia. And here I'm afraid the mood turns darker. Buoyed by the success of our first season, plans for a second were even more ambitious. In fact, more ambitious than we would have chosen. We wanted to continue at Theatre on the Square, doing four performances a week for six weeks.

But the theatre managers held out for six nights a week. Much haggling ensued. They no doubt detected that we couldn't bear to say no, and so they continually tightened the screws, to extract as much blood as they possibly could. For example, Dino negotiated with them for weeks to work out an arrangement for sharing the theatre with another group that would take it on our off-nights. They said fine, but this in no way diminished our rental obligation. We were still charged for the full week.

The upshot was that we did end up by getting the theatre for six nights a week, which for us was a huge expansion, a leap into the unknown. Bear in mind that growth generally has to be gradual. Unless you have a lot of money to spend on publicity, unless you can promote the expanded season in a big way, you're probably headed for disaster. We were on relatively safe ground in starting out with *La Vie Parisienne*, which had been such a hit the summer before. But followups are notoriously dangerous.

It is always awkward, probably foolish and certainly futile to argue with one's critics, but here I think we had a case. Our opening performance was reviewed by a critic on the *Chronicle* who boasted that he had attended only two performances of opera in his life, both of which had put him promptly to sleep. In earlier columns he had expressed equal pride in his ignorance of literature, boasting of the classics that he had never subjected himself to the tedious task of reading.

Crawford: Do you want to say who that was?

Pippin: With pleasure. His name was Gerald Nachman.

Crawford: Strange selection.

Pippin: Nonetheless, I would have thought that if any opera or operetta could have converted him or won him over, *La Vie Parisienne* was the one to do it. It had all the elements that he was likely to respond to. God knows, it's tuneful, light, colorful, lively, and funny. It has everything, most of all the sheer exuberance of life in Paris à la Offenbach.

He remained immune. The tone of his review suggested that he had been unwittingly transplanted into an exotic, rarified, alien atmosphere inhabited only by snobs, eccentrics, aesthetes, and poseurs--pretentious people who acted as if they were enjoying themselves in order to impress their inferiors.

Now many people, including us, have ruefully noted that good reviews are often not as helpful as one might hope, but bad reviews can be poison. Poison that kills. The worst possible way to begin a season where everything depends on generating interest and enthusiasm.

Our next performance made matters even worse. It was a double bill of operettas by Jerome Kern and George Gershwin: *Oh, Boy!* and *Oh, Kay!* A neat pairing, don't you think? Something of an innovation for us.

Again, Nachman reviewed the performance. This time I would have thought that what we were doing was right up his alley, because in all sincerity, his taste and interest seemed to begin about 1920 and end about 1950. Well, our double bill just barely fitted into that narrow time span. [laughter] He truly loves the plays and musicals of that period, so he should have felt quite at home with Kern and Gershwin. But what he objected to was the voices.

Crawford: Too operatic?

Pippin: Absolutely. He was used to hearing voices on records--at least that is what he unfavorably compared us to--where singers can abandon legitimate singing altogether for whispering and crooning. He was unaccustomed to the straightforward sound that is essential if it's to carry in a theatre without a mike. To him, this was operatic. How damning can you get?

Furthermore, he likes the gooey, sentimental, nonrhythmical style that I detest--as did Gershwin.

So once more, his review was decidedly negative. To overcome two bad reviews in the very first week would have required a miracle--a miracle that did not happen.

Despite the bad start, our two premieres, *Orpheus in the Underworld* and *Oh, Boy! Oh, Kay!* did well.

Crawford: Had you ever done an American musical before?

Pippin: No, this was a departure. With both musicals, I was quite surprised to find that if you extract the music, each one lasts less than an hour. The rest is all dialogue, and lots of it. Essentially they are plays with music, and more than half the evening would be the play, punctuated by a song here and there. That's why we could perform all the music, compress most of the dialogue into a crisp narration, and do both of them in one evening.

Crawford: You did the narration?

Pippin: Yes, and frankly I can hardly imagine either of them being revived in its original form. The music in both is thoroughly delightful, but the dialogue is hopelessly inane, unless taken in *very* small doses. Now this was a nasty surprise, because both of them were written by P. G. Wodehouse, and I happen to be one of Wodehouse's most avid admirers.

Crawford: Me, too.

Pippin: Well, one of the endearing things about Wodehouse--a reassurance to us all--was that he really didn't hit his stride till he was about fifty. I love him, but his earlier novels fall rather flat. In these musicals he had not yet reached that golden age. Still, even then, he was a damn good lyricist.

Crawford: Are the Cole Porter musicals also dated?

Pippin: I'm not familiar with any of them as a whole. If access is anything like that to Kern and Gershwin, it would not be easy to get to know them. We got the libretti and vocal scores for *Oh, Boy! Oh, Kay!* only because we rented them for what seemed an exorbitant fee.

Crawford: From the estates.



Pippin: The estates. I take serious issue with U.S copyright laws which, needless to say, reap no benefit to the composer. With *Oh, Kay!* we are talking about a piece composed more than seventy-five years ago by a composer who has been dead for sixty-five years. Why should it not be in public domain? Why should performance rights be prohibitively expensive? I can't imagine that any creative artist would want this.

##

Pippin: For several months we were reeling from the financial debacle of the second Offenbachanalia. We had lost fifty thousand dollars. I was exhausted and somewhat depressed. To make matters worse, I had started work on an opera that--I think for the first time--I was not warming up to, Rossini's *Count Ory*. Oh, I eventually changed my mind and enjoyed it very much. Silly and artificial as it is, it contains some of Rossini's finest music, and the story allows one to have lots of fun with it. But my initial displeasure was no doubt a projection of my downcast mood.

Another setback was around the corner. The California Arts Council, which had been faithfully supporting Pocket Opera, suddenly rejected us. They showed us the letter from one of their evaluators on which their decision was based. It was the most scathing, vitriolic, personally aimed document I have ever seen. Two closely typed pages of insult, and almost all of it aimed directly at me. A sample remark: "Pippin tries to play the piano but my dog sightreads better." The writer conceded that I surrounded myself with first-rate musicians, but my presence was so disorienting that they were rendered incapable of playing in tune or in rhythm. And that was just the first paragraph! It warmed up.

Evidently they took this seriously. Dino protested, and appealed the case. We attended a meeting of the CAC in Sacramento, where we heard more of the same from people who admittedly had never attended a Pocket Opera performance.

I remember one remark: "The state should not support a group whose sole aim is to make fun of opera by making it sound stupid or boring." Can you imagine? Could anything be further from my intention? However, Dino had also started his own letter campaign, by calling a number of our staunch supporters and asking them to weigh in.

Well, I want you to know that our supporters are nothing if not verbal! We were privately informed by a member of the Council that they had never seen anything like it. Eventually



the grant was restored, thanks to Steven Goldstein, president of the Council, who was much impressed by the quality of the response. But it was a nasty experience, and it came at a low point.

Dino's immediate problem was how to launch the next season, with a deadline approaching and virtually no money. Not a dime, even for printing and postage. It was time for the guardian angel to reappear, and so it did: an unsolicited and totally unexpected check from Gordon Getty for ten thousand dollars arrived in the mail one day. We were again off and running.

What really kept us going, though, was a long-range hope that was dimly appearing on the horizon--the possibility at last of a permanent home base, a theatre of our own, without which it is so difficult to establish an identity. A place where we could at last take roots. This had long been Dino's dream: a crossroads where theatre, opera, and dance could meet and mingle. The Waterfront Theatre at Ghirardelli Square was the answer. It was the right size, affordable, congenial, and located in an attractive, pleasant part of town. It had briefly been home to the enlarged hungry i, but had not been used as a theatre, I believe, for twenty years.

I do not know the details of how Dino became manager--no doubt the result of tireless effort and endless negotiation. But through sheer determination, he succeeded. As he later said, "This was the thing I wanted most in my entire life."

Pocket Opera opened the Waterfront Theatre in the spring of '87. Much excitement! We had arrived at the Promised Land! Another little known but delectable operetta by Offenbach, *The Princess of Trebizonde*, was our first presentation, followed by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Belle Helene*, *Semele*, *Ariodante*, and two premieres: Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and Bellini's *Norma*.

Now a word about the Mozart. This is the first and only opera that I have updated, transporting the action into twentieth-century Turkey--I hope the Turks will forgive me! The story is about four young American tourists, three of whom are being held captive by a charming but iron-willed local big shot for whom "The law is what I say it is." They are arrested presumably on a trumped-up marijuana charge, but in fact because the Pasha has taken a fancy to Constanza, one of the American girls. And of course her sweetheart Belmonte comes to their rescue.

The adaptation, rechristened *Yanked from the Harem*, closely follows the outline of the original, but it does flesh it out a bit, and makes it far livelier. Updating Mozart seems to be the fashion, but please! Let me distance myself as much as possible from the highly touted work of Peter Sellars, which I loathe and abhor. He seems to take all that is repellent, degraded and disgusting in the twentieth century and pass it off as profound insight into Mozart. Believe me, I aimed at no such profundity!

It was our next opera, though, that opened the doors of controversy. *Norma* has long been regarded as a sacred icon that one should approach with the utmost caution. True enough. We were harshly criticized for taking on such a difficult opera, such a big opera. One critic put it down to "megalomania" and so it might seem. But the only way you can find out your limits is by sometimes going beyond them. And by testing your limits you sometimes find that you can go further than you thought you could. Had I stayed from the start within plausible limits, we would still be doing only charming little one-acters for three singers. Many, if not most, of the operas we have done over the years seemed at the time a leap into the unknown. You jump and hope that the parachute opens.

*Norma* is of course a big opera, but the real bigness, the grandeur, is in the core, in the most intimate scenes: Norma's famous aria "Casta Diva," her two extended duets with Adalgisa, the trio where the three leading characters have a dramatic confrontation.

The story of a woman of heroic proportions is one of the strongest in all of opera, and a powerful reason for doing it in a language that speaks directly to the mind and heart. The title role has long been considered the ultimately demanding role for a soprano. The sheer fact of having on hand a soprano worthy of the part is a strong enough inducement for putting on the opera. Vicky Van Dewark did indeed give a stunning performance that in the opinion of at least one critic "approached greatness."

Crawford: Why were you attacked?

Pippin: For presumption, I suppose. But God knows, I had been equally presumptuous many times before. But this was blasphemy. Violation of a sacred shrine. But it was Heuwell Tircuit in the *Chronicle* that mystified me.

Crawford: How so?

Pippin: He ridiculed the opera, and ridiculed us for taking it seriously. The absurdity of a woman having two small children unknown to anyone else!

Crawford: I hate to be unkind, but perhaps he didn't attend.

Pippin: How can you think such a thing! [laughter] Well, opera plots are often unfairly ridiculed for the simple reason that opera allows no room for explanations. There are dozens of plausible explanations for Norma's perilous dilemma, and another opera could be written about the years in which she concealed the existence of her two children and why it was necessary, but that's not what this opera is about. It is simply a given fact. Opera is not about past tense; it's about the present and what happens now.

Honesty compels me to mention another review that appeared in the Sacramento *Bee*. The reviewer went into raptures about the sublime music and glorious singing, and went on to describe the story as "something about a goddess who comes down to earth and is punished for falling in love with a mere mortal." So much for speaking directly to the mind and heart! I can only hope that some minds and ears are more open and alert.

All in all, though, '87 was a great year, which included a weeklong tour of Hawaii with *Così fan tutte*. But the outstanding event of our week on the islands was a Pick of the Pockets performance at a grade school to the most responsive, enthusiastic audience we have ever had.

Equally welcome was a call from Peter Mark Schifter, a marvelously gifted director who was opening the Houston Opera Center's new theatre complex with a production of *Abduction from the Seraglio*. He wanted to use *Yanked from the Harem*. I was more than delighted.

He had used one of my translations before, when the Washington Opera did *La Belle Helene* in '83 at the Kennedy Center. So please pardon another digression. [laughter] I went to Washington to see the production, which I enjoyed tremendously. One could not hope to find a more inventive, animated and unpretentious director than Peter, whose personality perfectly matched the exuberance and geniality of Offenbach's.

But he was frustrated by the conditions that he had to work under, and for good reason. I arrived about three days before the opening, and Peter had still been granted practically no time to work with the entire cast--an operetta where the entire

cast is on stage most of the time. And this was an elaborate production. The day before the opening, a preview was given for an invited audience--the theatre was packed--and they had to stop about fifteen minutes before the end because they'd not yet had time to stage the finale. I repeat, this was one day before the opening.

I had attended one prior rehearsal--the first orchestra rehearsal. After things had been going for about forty-five minutes, everything came to a stop. The orchestra, by union contract, was taking a well-deserved twenty-minute break. The orchestra returned, but now there was another twenty-minute break for the singers, also under contract. The breaks were not synchronized.

Crawford: But that's crazy!

Pippin: Remember, this is Washington. [laughter] Please, no cynicism. But it was somewhat reassuring to find that some companies had to cope with even worse problems than we did. When and how Peter choreographed the last fifteen minutes before the opening the following day, I have no idea.

But I had my own little gripe with the production as well. Some companies employ what is called a dramaturg, somebody that goes through the script and makes adjustments. Well, I don't like it when people do that to my work.

Crawford: Did he do that?

Pippin: That was his job. And it seemed to me that he did it with a tin ear. Just to give two examples that come to mind: the opening line of one song goes, "Dare you accuse a man of Zeus?" This is sung by a corrupt priest, "a highly holy man," and the *sound*, often as important as the sense, is meant to convey an oozy, sleazy feeling: "Dare you *accuse* a man of Zeus?" The line was changed to "Dare you attack a man of Zeus?"

Crawford: No poetry there.

Pippin: Another example, from the duet between Helen and Paris. Paris has showed up at her bedside, and Helen is convinced that she must be dreaming: "A dream of love too sweet to stay, a dream that dawn will snatch away." The line was changed to: "A dream that dawn will steal away." It sounds as if dawn is creeping out.

Such changes may seem of minor importance, but there were lots of them and they do add up. Style depends on precision.

Crawford: Your translation wasn't copyrighted?

Pippin: It was, and I was tempted to make a fuss about it. But the singers already had quite enough to cope with in those last three days.

Crawford: It must have changed it considerably.

Pippin: Dozens and dozens of lines I thought were weakened. The very last line in the play, when I heard it I thought, "How could I have written such a pointless, feeble ending?" I was at least relieved to find out later that I had *not* written it. It had been tacked on by the dramaturg.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed the production, thanks largely to Peter's work, for which I have total admiration. This was in '83. Tragically, he died a few years later while still in his thirties. His death was preceded by another, equally tragic.

I was invited in the summer of '86 to do a translation of *The Merry Widow*. The invitation came from Gil Russack, the artistic director of the Lamplighters--another wonderfully gifted person, as singer, actor, stage director and conductor. A person who truly loved operetta and the vanished world that it represented. He was also extremely knowledgeable.

He had done *The Merry Widow* before, but was dissatisfied with the translation he had used as well as with others that he had perused, and so he called to ask if I were interested. Oddly, I had never heard *The Merry Widow*. I had a recording of it, and had listened to about two minutes of the overture and was so repelled that I turned it off. The lush, gooey Hollywood sound was not for me. So when Gil suggested it, I was not enthusiastic, but I said that I would listen to it.

To my great surprise, once past the overture, I was thoroughly charmed by the music. I then discovered that the overture had been tacked on by a later hand.

Crawford: No!

Pippin: Oh, yes! Léhar gave it the briefest of preludes, before it dives into action. Delectable music! I greatly enjoyed writing the lyrics, but a serious problem was looming--I could not locate the libretto that contained the copious spoken dialogue.

I called the Library of Congress. I called all the individuals I could think of who might have a collection of



opera libretti. No luck. Gil was also exploring on his own, but the best we could come up with were the highly abridged versions given on record jackets. So much abridged that they barely let you know what the plot is. As a result, my libretto is somewhat more "original" than I would have chosen.

Crawford: How could there not be a libretto for such a famous work?

Pippin: I daresay that the publishers are doing their damndest to keep it to themselves. It must be one of their most valuable properties. Though bear in mind, *The Merry Widow* dates from 1906. It surely must be in public domain by now.

Crawford: Wouldn't the San Francisco Opera copy it for you or let you see it? They performed it about that time, didn't they?

Pippin: I would guess that they were also working from translation. There have been many adaptations. The original German libretto was what I wanted to see, in order to have a solid springboard to take off from.

Our efforts to find it were unsuccessful, but this turned out to be something of a liberation. I was free--compelled, rather--to go my own way, though as with *Yanked from the Harem*, I stuck close to the basic outline, as best I could make it out.

Crawford: Have other companies performed it?

Pippin: The Lamplighters were first, but since then, it has been performed by a good many companies. In fact, it has been the most widely performed of all my translations.

Before the first rehearsals, something truly terrible happened. On a Thursday afternoon, I went to the Lamplighters headquarters to read my lyrics to Gil and to Stuart Beaman. But I'd not yet started on the dialogue, and I was still baffled as to how to go about it. However, I promised to cobble something together immediately, because they were holding their auditions on the following Tuesday night and wanted to have something on hand for the singers to read from.

We planned to meet again on Monday. Gil said, "On second thought, let's make it Tuesday. I have to go to the hospital on Monday for some routine minor surgery." I called Tuesday morning to verify the appointment. The person who answered the phone said, "I'm sorry. Gil died yesterday." The surgery had gone horribly wrong.



Despite the shock, they proceeded that night with the auditions. I daresay that Jonathan Fields, the director, was disappointed with the dialogue that I had hastily put together. We got together, and he talked to me at some length to express his own feelings about the operetta, derived from a much longer familiarity than mine. He spoke eloquently, and I am greatly indebted to him for the improvement that followed.

Under his direction, the Lamplighters gave it a beautiful production. Lenore Turner and Baker Peeples both gave exquisite, genuinely moving performances in the two leading roles. And there was a stunning comic performance by John Gilkerson in the role of Baron Zeta, the pompous and fat-headed diplomat who is self-assured and mistaken at every turn in the road.

This role was built up considerably more than usual in my libretto, providing a large percentage of the comedy as well as the motor power. To say that John did it to perfection would be an understatement. I had never dreamed that the role could be so rich. Rick Williams was marvelously funny, too, in a smaller role.

I was so enamored of the operetta by this time that we decided the following year to do it ourselves for the Christmas season. Despite the excellent direction of Stephen Drewes, and despite the presence of some of the original cast, including Baker Peeples, John Gilkerson and Rick Williams, our production had some major shortcomings and on the whole was a disappointment. Plus the fact that the Waterfront Theatre had a primitive heating system and the ten days we were there was a period of record cold. The audience shivered, and not even Léhar could warm them up.

Shortly afterwards, disaster struck. Suddenly, out of the blue, the Waterfront Theatre, our new and supposedly permanent home, was shut down. The dream collapsed. Dino, who had resigned as manager of Pocket Opera in order to become manager of the Waterfront Theatre, which he had been largely instrumental in bringing about, could no doubt tell the story in far greater detail and more accurately than I.

It was the result, I gather, of opening on a shoestring, operating with no margin for error, a series of sudden cancelations, unkept promises and funds that failed to materialize--all of it compounded by an acrimonious and undependable board which abruptly decided to take over. A short-lived endeavor! The doors were soon closed permanently.

This was a devastating blow to Dino as well as to us. Our permanent home had lasted less than a year. We were again out on the streets, searching. Where to go next?

To my amazement, the On Broadway that I had always been so fond of was again available. But now, seven years after we had last performed there, it was the grim ghost of what it had been. The seats had been removed, as well as the raked floor. The florid decor, all the trimmings were gone. The walls were covered with graffiti. It looked like an old house in shambles, after years of abandonment. Fellini would have probably loved it.

Crawford: Who was responsible?

Pippin: It had been through many hands, many transformations, and probably a number of vandalisms. I was shocked to see my theatre--a dear old friend--in this horrible condition. Nonetheless, it was our best shot. Even in its heyday, people had been leery of the neighborhood. Some of our clientele disliked climbing the stairs leading up to it. Once inside, many felt that it was a firetrap, which it was. But what was the alternative? We tidied it up as best we could and brought in folding chairs that made our longtime supporters yearn for the comforts of the Old Spaghetti Factory.

We had already lost much of our audience in moving to the pleasant Waterfront Theatre, far away from the central theatre district. We lost still more in returning to the dismal On Broadway. Our audiences now were a fraction of what they had been. And the dispiriting atmosphere of the On Broadway was anything but conducive to rebuilding an audience.

And yet, despite all, there is something about that room--the balcony is indestructible. It seems to enfold the room. The acoustics are excellent. Perhaps the discomforts bring out the pioneer spirit. The sense of roughing it can make an audience good-naturedly alert. And no doubt we were by this time reduced to our *most* devoted, loyal supporters. For whatever reason, audiences there have always been exceptionally responsive. And this was true in '88, just as much as it had been before.

That season we added *Bluebeard* to our Offenbach repertory, as well as a double bill of two one-acters by Weber and Donizetti--*Abu Hassan* and *Betly*. All in all, there were enough outstanding things about the season to make us feel good, including a return of *Luisa Miller* with Miriam Delevan and

Michael Licciardello, but the future was even more clouded than before. And things were soon to go from bad to worse.

At the end of the season I went on unemployment insurance for the first time in thirty years.

##

Pippin: Despite the dire circumstances, I still felt that we were in capable hands. Our new manager's attitude was positive, and he was full of plans for lifting us out of the wreckage--plans that were creative and exciting, but which remained in the visionary stage.

Crawford: What was his name?

Pippin: Because of later developments, I'd rather not say. He had been hired by Dino on the strength of some golden words that he uttered, words that fell on the ear like celestial music: "A board should not be expected to raise funds. That will be my job."

Crawford: The board must have loved hearing that.

Pippin: They threw their arms around him and cried, "Don't let him go!"

Well, this person let it be known that he was taking on the job entirely out of the goodness of his heart and his vast respect for what we were doing, because he did not need the salary he was being offered. Another astonishing plus! He was indeed full of grandiose schemes for raising funds and for pulling the company back together again, but for some reason nothing seemed to materialize.

And two days before Christmas, I and several board members received an irate letter of resignation. Not only was the resignation immediate, but he was demanding four weeks severance pay. Furthermore, because someone had casually mentioned at some time or other a possible raise in salary, he was now demanding a six-month retroactive raise, with health benefits.

That was not all. For a year, he had been storing some Pocket Opera supplies in his home basement. Now he was retroactively charging two hundred a month for storage space. He was confiscating the rest of our office equipment, and said that unless his demands were met within thirty days, he would be compelled to sell off the equipment.

All told, his demands ran into thousands of dollars. He also threatened to sue for additional thousands. What he hoped to gain by this I cannot imagine. No one knew better than he the state of our finances--flat broke and overwhelmed with massive debt, a debt of over a hundred thousand dollars. Merry Christmas, everybody!

On top of that, we had recently found out that we owed the U.S government twenty-six thousand dollars in payroll taxes, which a previous manager, his predecessor, also nameless, had failed to pay or to mention to anyone else. This was discovered, I believe, when a lien was placed on the meager Pocket Opera bank accounts. It is hard to understand how an intelligent, conscientious person (which I think he was) could have done this, knowing it to be the fatal bullet that has killed many an arts organization.

Crawford: And of course no one else knew about it.

Pippin: Yet it was even harder to understand how or why someone who had presumably been laboring for a year to keep the company afloat could suddenly become so vindictive, now doing everything in his power to bring the company to collapse. My guess is that he was enraged at finding himself in a hopeless situation that, to his thinking, was none of his own making, and which, despite his previous boasts, he was powerless to fix. Perhaps, more simply, his bluff had been called. At any rate, he lashed out.

In the early 1960s, I had undergone a cancer operation from which, I learned afterwards, my chances of survival were rated at 2 percent. I think that any objective, reasonable person would have placed the same odds now on Pocket Opera.

Yet the cancer operation was a positive experience, because I did survive, and because I learned from it how many people cared and how deeply they cared. Pocket Opera's crisis brought about the same revelation, and it survived only because of the people that cared.

First of all, the board rallied around. There were numerous meetings to which, to my chagrin, I was not invited.

Crawford: Maybe they wanted to spare you.

Pippin: Exactly. That was certainly the reason, but as a result I am rather vague about what went on. Among themselves they contributed the money needed to meet the demands of the letter, and they devised a way to get the government off our backs at least temporarily.

Jim Erhart, a new member but a longtime supporter, volunteered to serve as acting manager for no salary, and our survival is largely due to his determination, his remarkable talents and good sense. Suzanne Gump, another board member, volunteered to work in the office for at least forty hours a week, also for no salary. Marilyn Erhart, Jim's wife, made a similar offer. They did so, and continued to do so for more than two years. Christine Hardy also gave full time to put the chaotic books in order, and eventually took on the role of manager herself. The Hewlett Foundation gave generous emergency support.

Because of them, the season went ahead as planned, and a year later, amazingly, we were out of debt. It proves that miracles can happen--with more than a little human help.

[Interview 8: May 20, 1998] ##

Pippin: Well, I believe we left off in the dark days. And they were dark indeed. It looked as if we were surely going to go down in flames, but instead, the phoenix emerged from the fire.

I wish I could say that the new offerings of that season of '89 were a brilliant reaffirmation of all the best that Pocket Opera stood for and a grateful tribute to those who were working so hard to make its survival possible. But in fact the list was weak, certainly lightweight, and probably reflected my own months of anxiety and distraction.

Still, it had its points. It included four shorter operas which combined into two double bills. One of them was Bizet's early opera *Don Procopio*, which has something of the spirit and even some of the tunes of his even earlier Symphony in C, composed at the age of seventeen. The score is on a consistently high level, but Bizet had notoriously bad luck with his libretti before he came upon *Carmen*--a point well illustrated by *Don Procopio*.

The story is that of a young lady being forced by her avaricious uncle into marriage with a rich old man, Don Procopio. Opera has never been the same since women won the right to control their own lives! [laughter] In this case, the situation is resolved near the beginning of Act I--not the best way to maintain dramatic tension. From that point on, the opera merely spins on. But it spins on with colorful characters, lively and often lovely duets and trios, and music that is sparkling, inventive and even ravishing.



Another piece in which I liked the music unreservedly was a one-acter by Chabrier called *An Education Incomplete*. In terms of the book, it is the flimsiest trifle imaginable: a totally naive young couple on their wedding night, neither of them having the slightest idea of what marriage implies or what they should do about it. An oversight in the young man's education for which his scholarly professor is entirely to blame. You will be happy to know that by the end of the act they have satisfactorily figured it out entirely on their own.

The young man, incidentally, is performed by a soprano, and in our case most charmingly performed by Marta Johansen. She's a lovely lady with beautiful blond hair, and she wore a most becoming mustache for the occasion. And with her trim figure she was very appealing, very convincing.

Crawford: A trouser soprano?

Pippin: Instead of the usual trouser mezzo.

As in the Bizet, Chabrier's music is distinctive from beginning to end and even more sophisticated stylistically. But to my surprise, several friends whose opinions I tend to listen to hated it. Nothing like frankness! They called it the worst thing we had ever done. I could only guess that they were so turned off by the foolish story and found the joke so insipid or labored or God knows what that they paid no attention to the music. At any rate, I was taken aback by their vehemence.

Crawford: How was the audience response?

Pippin: It seemed all right, but less than overwhelming. However, it was done on a double bill with *My Fair Galatea* by Franz von Suppe, and everybody, including my affronted friends, loved *My Fair Galatea*. I did, too. The music is captivating, and in this case the book is a worthy match. It's the story of Pygmalion, the sculptor who falls in love with the statue that he's created. Miraculously, in answer to his prayers to Venus, the statue comes to life. But Galatea turns out to be quite a handful--gorgeous indeed, but capricious, difficult and demanding. By the end of the one act, Pygmalion is quite happy to have her turned back into a statue.

In this double bill, Marta Johansen underwent a striking transformation herself, from the naive young man of *An Education Incomplete* to the divinely beautiful but all too human statue.



Crawford: Von Suppe is little done nowadays.

Pippin: True, but he was among the first of a long line of gifted composers who seemed to be blessed with an endless, effortless flow of enjoyable music, which they turned into operetta. In fact, he was known as the father of Viennese operetta. The list would include the likes of von Flotow, Auber, Nicolai, Johann Strauss, Arthur Sullivan, LeCocq and Léhar. Their music was aimed primarily to give immediate, spontaneous pleasure--charming, polished, ingratiating, yet sometimes rising to heights of real lyric beauty.

These were composers who had mastered the language and made no great effort to extend it. This language was easily understood and born out of a comfortable rapport with their audience. I doubt that any of them had a great horror of sounding like someone else.

Crawford: What about Offenbach?

Pippin: I would put him on a higher level. And certainly Bizet, who often spoke the shared language, but couldn't help sounding like no one else.

Crawford: You don't do American musicals, but are any of them--we've talked about Gershwin--are any of them on a comparable level?

Pippin: I have to plead ignorance. I've not had all that much exposure. Though I would unhesitatingly add Bernstein's *Candide* to the list of great operettas. Generally, I don't like the Broadway style of singing. I loathe the sentimental crooning, and I also dislike the brassy, belted out sound that seems to be the accepted alternative.

Crawford: And the amplification. But couldn't some of these be done operatically?

Pippin: Well, I shy away from the term. Too suggestive of Aida or Brunnhilde. But in the premicrophone days, they had to be legitimately sung. To fill a theatre, a voice has to be reasonably well-produced--or call it operatic. You remember, we did experiment with American musicals once, with a double feature of *Oh, Boy!* and *Oh, Kay!* I enjoyed them very much, sung in a straightforward style by trained voices. I would love to do more. But we've not done so. Not yet.

What we did do that season was *Flavio*, a new Handel opera, the first in a number of years. I used to do new Handel regularly, but as I became more and more interested in

translation I neglected Handel, whose operas I would not care to translate.

Crawford: Why not?

Pippin: The reason for translating an opera is to bring the drama to life through immediacy, by connecting the listener with what is going on moment by moment. Handel's operas consist almost entirely of solo arias separated by stretches of recitative. The arias, awesomely great as they are, are not dramatic. They usually express a single thought or feeling which the singer simply stands and sings, and then repeats with ornamentation. The gain of knowing precisely what is being said does not make up for the loss in purely musical values. There's no getting away from it. Italian is the language of choice for sheer vocalism. And in my narration I do try to make abundantly clear what each aria is about, so that the audience is never left in the dark.

Crawford: Yes. Well, we haven't talked much about your audiences, but do they know when they hear a good performance?

Pippin: Absolutely! To such an extent that I feel a certain dread for the singers when they take their solo bows at the end. It's like being judged at a contest, or worse yet, appraised at an auction. The dreaded applause meter!

Crawford: Well, it's a sign of respect, isn't it?

Pippin: Yes, but I would hate to be the poor singer that comes out meagerly on the applause. On the other hand, I'm reminded of a story about Pavlova, who was unhappy after a performance. Her confidante or whoever said, "But you heard the audience go wild. How can you be unhappy?" She said, "I danced much better yesterday. I would have been pleased if tonight they had applauded a little bit less."

Crawford: Overpraised?

Pippin: One appreciates the nicety of feeling, but I must say that I have heard few complaints about too much applause. [laughter]

Crawford: It seems to me that audiences respond inappropriately at times, at something awkward or just unfamiliar. Do you ever ask, "Why did they laugh at that?"

Pippin: I'm more likely to ask, "Why *didn't* they laugh at that?" [laughter] Seriously, though, too much laughter can be as unsettling as too little. And I *am* sometimes mystified. But

laughter in the right places is like mother's milk. And an appropriately responsive audience is like having good acoustics. It allows you to give easily, like conversing with someone that you feel comfortable with.

##

Pippin: The season also included an old friend, Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, one of his greatest and one of the few that could remotely be called well known. Aside from sublimely moving moments, like the forced separation of a mother from her son, it has its share of melodrama and comedy. The petty warfare between young Cleopatra and her sibling brother Tolomy, Cleopatra's wooing of Caesar, when she casts a spell so potent that she falls in love with *him*. And the ending where Caesar, triumphant, crowns Cleopatra Queen of Egypt: "Who else has such lovely hair?"

We, too, had our own dramatic crisis. The day before the performance, Sara Ganz, our Cleopatra, whispered over the telephone that her voice was gone. And so it was. She could barely speak. Somebody suggested Judith Nelson, a thoroughly experienced Handelian singer of national reputation.

Miraculously, she just happened to be available, though entirely unfamiliar with the part. But she picked up the score that evening, we got together the next morning to go over the arias at the piano, and two hours later she gave a performance that most singers would be happy to achieve after months of work.

As you know, singers are often put down for being poor musicians or even nonmusicians, but the opposite is generally the case--certainly with the fine singers. Handel poses the supreme test. Singers not only have to sing the printed notes impeccably with all that this implies in terms of virtuosity, nuance and expression, but also they are expected, obligated to improvise, to elaborate, to add ornaments and cadenzas, which should sound as if the composer had written them. It requires that they feel completely at home with the style and bold enough to play with it.

Crawford: You've said before that we have such a pool here of wonderful singers. Would you find that elsewhere?

Pippin: I doubt it, except for a few major metropolitan centers. Of course, I've never been elsewhere. [laughter] But no, I would guess that we are particularly lucky.

Crawford: In casting, do you have covers? Do you know who else can sing or is currently singing a role?

Pippin: Almost never. Not through choice. Perhaps through delicacy, I would hesitate to ask it especially of a singer who was up to doing the role. Occasionally a singer has volunteered.

On the whole, we've been miraculously lucky, but there have been a few close calls. At a performance of *Roberto Devereux* the mezzo lead got laryngitis, the singer's nightmare. Heroically, Tracy Tornquist, one of the singers from the ensemble who had become reasonably familiar with the whole opera, stood by the piano and sang with apparent ease and confidence from the score while the mezzo went silently through the motions on stage, acting out the part. Such emergencies have been blessedly few.

So, onward! We are up to '90, and as usual, homeless. The Waterfront Theatre had briefly reopened under new management--we were there for the '89 season, in fact--but its doors were now closed again, this time never to reopen. We seem to have left behind us an impressive wake of destroyed theatres. [laughter] Like General Sherman marching through Georgia. Please, don't let the word get around!

We found a place on Sutter Street called the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. We were in no position to quibble, but the Lorraine Hansberry had a tiny stage, and in order to get back and forth backstage from one side to the other, singers had to run downstairs, cross an indoor swimming pool, then through the ladies' dressing room, and race back upstairs. Oh, the naked ladies that were periodically startled by an onslaught of opera singers charging through their quarters!

Again, the familiar problem of sharing a theatre with another company. In this case, the other company used a set depicting the skyline of Manhattan, which meant that we had to use it, too--not exactly our concept of *Così fan tutte*. One might suppose, heaven forbid, that Pocket Opera had been taken over by Peter Sellars. You know what I think about that! Furthermore, the stage was so cramped that the piano and orchestra had to be placed in a strangely contorted position where contact was difficult. No, the Lorraine Hansberry was not the home we had dreamed of.

Partly because of the awkward conditions, the season was a mixed bag. Still, the two new operas were interesting. One was *The Daughter of Madame Angot*, by LeCocq, a prolific and gifted operetta composer with whom I would like to get better

acquainted. His contemporary reputation eclipsed even that of Offenbach. *Madame Angot* is reputedly his finest operetta. For us, it was fortuitously timely--set in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the collapse of the old regime.

Well, think back. In 1990 the Berlin wall had just fallen, the Soviet Union had collapsed, and the Cold War had ended. One did not have to reach far for parallels. In *Madame Angot*, the euphoria of victory has worn off. The atmosphere is one of restlessness, uncertainty and suspicion. Something new is in the process of emerging, symbolized by the coming of age of Madame Angot's daughter who finds wisdom in disillusion. Not the usual operetta fare!

The other new opera was an early work by Wagner, called *Das Liebesverbot*, *The Ban on Love*. I translated the title *No Love Allowed*. I do have mixed feelings about the opera. It was a total fiasco when first produced--a fiasco rivaling that of Verdi's *King for a Day*. Wagner himself later on vehemently disowned it, I daresay because it was written in an Italianate bel canto style. It was precisely what he revolted against in his later years, but a style in which he was remarkably adept. *No Love Allowed* is bel canto on a very high level indeed. The individual scenes are extraordinarily beautiful.

But I've always had problems with Wagner as a dramatist, and with *No Love Allowed*, especially so. He took a richly blended play by Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, and managed to make it simply disagreeable and distasteful.

Shakespeare's hero, anti-hero rather, Angelo, is a deputy viceroy, who is suddenly given the tools of absolute power which he uses to impose his own brand of rigidly severe, tightly Puritanical morality on his lax subjects. He discovers to his own dismay that he is driven by the same inner demons for which he has just sentenced a young man to death, demons that he is powerless to control in himself. He is tormented by the tension between the puritan and the lecher within. Anguish pulls him to ever greater extremes in both directions. But in the Wagner opera, he is simply a scoundrel and a fool. Interestingly enough, though, he is turned into a *German* fool, out of his element in the sun-soaked land of Sicily.

I don't much like what Wagner did with the heroine, either. I presume that this was his own adaptation. The chaste, high-minded, passionate novitiate of a nunnery comes across as callous and manipulative, someone who seems to enjoy prolonging pain in order to test a person's character.



It also seems to me that Wagner had no sense of proportion as a dramatist. Odd, when you consider that in music, proportion is everything. His incidental scenes go on forever. And the few attempts at humor strike me as crude and off-putting. Still, I think that the opera is redeemed by the quality of the music.

As you can imagine, both the LeCocq and the Wagner were huge, large-scale productions for Pocket Opera, and the restricted space at the Lorraine Hansberry was but one of many frustrations for our stage director, whose role in the company was becoming increasingly important.

My own inclination was to choose a director for each production, but several persuasive people on the board felt that it was far better to have a single director for an entire season for consistency of style. I was mindful of the warning about putting all your eggs into one basket, but cravenly went along with the idea.

In hindsight, it was clearly piling too much responsibility onto a single person. The directors that we found were talented and dedicated, but we were asking too much of them. They were put in an impossible situation, partly by my own inexperience with staged productions. I'm not sure how much longer I can fall back on the excuse of naivete, but bear in mind that at the time I was a mere sixty-three. [laughter]

I still did not realize the vast difference between our previous semistaged productions and the demands of the fully staged productions that we now aspired to. I did not allow the directors nearly enough time to do their work, and they were not experienced enough to demand it. Nor did any of us realize the complexities of planning a rehearsal schedule.

In the real world that we live in, most of our singers have outside jobs that provide their livelihood. Often they have regular commitments to other musical organizations. A director cannot simply call a rehearsal for two in the afternoon or seven in the evening, even with several weeks notice, and expect many people to show up. In more recent years, we've engaged a full-time production manager. Negotiating rehearsal times is by far the most arduous part of the job, like juggling ten balls.

Crawford: It sounds like a huge job.

Pippin: And enormously frustrating. Rebecca Nestle, through dogged persistence, later got the process under control. But until



then, our directors tended to take the high-handed attitude: "They signed up for the role; it's up to them to make themselves available." The result: endless wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Because of scheduling conflicts and complications, operas usually have to be staged the way a movie is made. You work with the people that are on hand. If you have two people who sing a duet in Act III, that is what you start with; then you go back to the quartet in Act II, and wind up with the finale of Act I. Not exactly ideal, but nothing unusual about *that*.

One of our directors held valiantly to his conviction that opera, like all drama, should be staged strictly in sequence from beginning to end. At the first rehearsal he might perhaps have three people on hand. After tearing his hair out for half an hour, he would proceed to stage the big opening ensemble. At the next rehearsal, fifteen people would show up. Ah, time for the duet! While the other thirteen are sitting around chewing their nails.

Crawford: I would guess that you didn't invite him back.

Pippin: I'm afraid not. I should have taken a firmer stand and at least insisted on more careful advance planning. But I, too, had to learn the hard way.

Crawford: Did you ever do any directing yourself?

Pippin: Only the most rudimentary, and mostly back in the early days. I can't do much, of course, while playing the piano, which is probably a damn good thing, as I suspect that I have little talent for it. One exception, though: I do like to direct the dialogue. At least I have strong ideas as to how it should be spoken, and sometimes get good results. Though at times I can't help recalling a remark by Gibbon to the effect that the only people you can teach or direct are those that have practically no need of it.

After a few seasons of one director for the entire season, we went back to the far more sensible practice of engaging a director for each production, and usually the director was chosen from our corps of singers. What a difference!

Crawford: Are there any who stand out in your memory?

Pippin: Shall I name names? Very well. Debra Lynn, one of our favorite mezzis, came on board to direct *La Belle Helene* in '92, and it was all suddenly so easy! After trudging across rugged

mountains we were on the smooth open plain. She did her homework, her planning was meticulous, and she knew who was coming to rehearsal and who was not. On top of that, she was talented and understood how to work within the Pocket Opera style. She directed a good many productions, of which about half a dozen Offenbachs were particularly outstanding.

Crawford: Who else?

Pippin: Several of our singers had a genuine gift for directing: Michael Taylor (*Bartered Bride, Barber of Seville, Elixir of Love, Don Giovanni, Lucrezia Borgia, La Cenerentola, Marriage of Figaro*); Madeline Abel-Kerns (*Tales of Hoffmann, Marriage by Lantern, Don Procopio, Soldier's Tale, Alice in Opera Land*); Andrew Morgan (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself, Yanked from the Harem, Magic Flute, Ernani*); Eileen Morris (*Mary Stuart, The Two Widows*); Jane Hammett (*Orpheus in the Underworld, Roberto Devereux*); Richard Cohan (*La Cenerentola*); Rod Gomez (*Martha*).

Of the directors that have come from outside the company, as it were, I have been very happy with Russell Blackwood (*La Vie Parisienne, Merry Widow, Carmen, La Traviata*); Jenny Lord, actress-dancer-choreographer (*Daughter of the Regiment, Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*); and Rick Dougherty (*Rigoletto, Merry Wives of Windsor, Don Pasquale, King for a Day*).

I had, and continue to have, the utmost confidence in each one of them. That confidence is absolutely essential, because both in rehearsal and in performance I'm busy with my own thing and I've found out that paying too much attention to what's going on behind my back can invite disaster. My focus, of course, is on listening to the singers and on leading the orchestra, not to mention my own playing. So you see, I'm often the last person to know. [laughter]

##

Pippin: I return to the recurrent theme of this lengthy saga, Pocket Opera's search for a home. In twelve years we had not performed in the same San Francisco theatre for two consecutive seasons. In '91, still looking, our eyes lit up: a five-hundred seat PG&E theatre--did I say something about lighting up--a great location on lower Market Street, and suddenly available. We moved in, intending to settle down for life, but less than a year later God decided otherwise. Pocket Opera was getting too comfortable. He sent an earthquake. And once again Pocket Opera in its ruthless forward march left behind it a devastated theatre. It has never reopened.

But we were allowed one outstanding season. One of its high points was the return of Kaaren Erickson in a solo recital of songs by Mozart and Strauss, in which I got a rare chance to accompany in a repertoire that is still closest to my heart. As usual, her artistry was ineffable. This was her last appearance with us. She died of cancer a few years later, while still in her early forties.

Her recital was part of a double bill with Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale*, one of my favorite works of the century, but as an opera something of an oddity. No singing! Instead, narration, dialogue, pantomime, choreography and incomparable music for a small, oddly matched chamber orchestra.

It demands first of all expert players--on violin, double bass, clarinet, trumpet, trombone and percussion. Plus a skilled conductor, larger-than-life actors, an accomplished dancer and an imaginative director to bring it all together. At the first rehearsal we discovered that, through a misunderstanding, we had no director at all! The presentation, I'm afraid, left something to be desired, though the work itself is strong enough to leave a profound impression. We did it again six years later, under the direction of Madeline Abel-Kerns, and this time the production, in my humble opinion, was magnificent. Michael Mendelsohn was spectacular as the devil. Hold on! Michael Mendelsohn as the devil was spectacular. [laughter]

The piece was a joy to translate--five or six hundred lines of rhymed couplets, mostly in an ironic comic style that I feel particularly at home with. But for me the real novelty was in being for once released from a straitjacket! For once I was not setting words to music, where one is absolutely bound to the rhythm and shape of the musical line, where not a syllable can be added or subtracted, and where the length and weight of each syllable is rigorously preordained. Suddenly free from captivity! Since most of *A Soldier's Tale* is spoken independently of the music, you're on your own. Enjoy! Live it up! Such a luxury I have never had, before or since.

One of our best seasons! *La Vie Parisienne*, *Xerxes*, *Ariodante*, *The Secret Marriage*, *Don Pasquale*, *Yanked from the Harem*, *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, besides the double bill. *The Secret Marriage* and *The Barber of Seville* were both new. I thought *The Secret Marriage* charming both dramatically and musically, but still a vivid reminder of what makes Mozart and Haydn great, in case one has forgotten. [laughter] *The Barber* needs no further endorsement from me. I

do love comedy! And both *The Secret Marriage* and *The Barber* provided the sort of playground that a child might dream of.

Crawford: Might your audience, seeing the season brochure, think "Cimarosa? Handel? Stravinsky? I don't know." Or do you find that they will take the unusual along with the standard fare?

Pippin: Well, there's no question that the better known an opera is, the bigger the audience one can expect to attract. This is especially true when you get away from the big city. So that one is constantly hoping to put on an opera that everyone knows and no one else performs. [laughter] In fact, we have to plan carefully, as to whether to do one, two, or three performances. It would be a great luxury to do half a dozen, but I'm afraid our audience has not expanded to that extent.

Incidentally, the following year the Merola program chose my translation of *The Secret Marriage* to perform in their annual outdoor program at Stern Grove. In truth, I thought it an odd choice. It's such an *indoor* opera! I was apprehensive about the result. And I was dead wrong. It came off marvelously, thanks to the inventive direction of Chad Raber-Shieber and a strong cast of singers. In subsequent years they've also done *Perichole*, *Elixir of Love*, and *Cenerentola*. Very happy experiences, all. Now *they* don't seem to have any trouble drawing a crowd!

But here we are again! Another season looming up and no place to go. After inspecting every conceivable alternative, even the On Broadway looked attractive. And that was where we landed, though most people regarded this as a huge step backward--an opinion they expressed in large part by staying home. We lost much of the audience that we had built up at the PG&E. Its condition was in an even more advanced stage of deterioration than before. Despite all, I was happy to be there, though I, too, can be realistic at times.

But once again the good Lord intervened to make any thought of returning out of the question. A huge hole in the roof was discovered. In June and July this made for pleasant ventilation, but it made the theatre somewhat less desirable in the rainy season. [laughter] Of course, nobody wanted to put up the considerable amount of money to fix the roof. And once again Pocket Opera leaves behind a theatre in ruins.

Crawford: Who owned the theatre?

Pippin: According to rumor, the Philippine mafia. True or not, I don't know. Inquiry was not encouraged. [laughter]

So next season, where do you think we were? That's right! Square one. Stuck with our perennial question, where to go next? It seemed that we had investigated every conceivable venue in town for the least bleak alternative.

Judith Whitney, our new and highly capable and trustworthy manager, finally set a deadline. If we were going to have a season, announcements must go out, plans must be set in motion. One day away from the deadline, we had grimly decided to use a space--I'll not dignify it by calling it a theatre--which I was convinced would lead to certain disaster. And then somebody suggested the Martin Mayer auditorium in Temple Emanu-El.

Judy and I went to look at it with a feeling of weary resignation. If it were remotely suitable, we would surely have heard of it before. Lo and behold, it turned out to be very much what we were hoping for but dared not expect. We looked at each other with a wild surmise. The Promised Land lay before us, and there we have dwelt happily ever since.

Crawford: Didn't you say something about problems next year? Will it still be available?

Pippin: Well, turning a few more pages in the Old Testament, we reach Ecclesiastes. Nothing in this life is permanent. We live in a state of flux. All is change. Fortune is an ever-turning wheel. [laughter]

But while the wheel is temporarily suspended, before it takes another spectacular spin, perhaps this would be a good time to bring this narration to a close. We have found a home at last. Six years of relative peace and prosperity have followed, thanks to the smooth management of Judith Whitney and the persistent care and long hours of both Rebecca Nestle and Laurel Vaughan as production manager. A couple of generous bequests, on top of many, many individual contributions, have brought us a period of unprecedented financial stability. So we've had a good long stretch of smooth sailing. May the voyage continue!

The repertory has continued to expand. The new translations include *The Bartered Bride*, *Rigoletto*, *The Star*, *The Elixir of Love*, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *The Magic Flute*, *The Gang of Bandits (I Masnadieri)*, *Ernani*, *The Daughter of the Regiment*, and *Carmen*. A list that I'm very proud of.



Thanks to the prodding of Russell Blackwood, the productions have also expanded in terms of purely theatrical values, while retaining the basic simple Pocket Opera style. The Pocket Philharmonic, painstakingly hand-picked for each performance by Diana Dorman, who also plays clarinet in most of the performances, is still seated onstage behind the singers, while I conduct from the piano.

Crawford: Any new directions?

Pippin: Well, we've gone back to school. In coordination with a fine national organization called Young Audiences, we have devised a program to present mostly to children in the lower grades. It's called Alice in Opera Land. Having lost her way, Alice stumbles upon Opera Land, where she meets four friendly singers who take her in hand and show her around this exciting and not too distant land, and introduce her to some of its colorful inhabitants: Figaro, Cinderella, Carmen, Lucia, two coloratura cats and even a wicked witch. Incidentally, we have a new and different Alice for each performance, a girl chosen from the school itself.

This evolved into a longer holiday show that we've been doing every year during the Christmas season, for children of all ages.

Crawford: After I saw it, I thought every child in the audience would demand a life in opera.

Pippin: Let's hope that opera will become at least a *part* of their lives!

Crawford: Any other new projects?

Pippin: There's one that is especially close to my own heart. With the help of the Haas Foundation and the Fleishhacker Foundation, Judy Whitney started us on what we call the Libretto Project. The aim is to create cleaner, more legible, more usable scores, via computer, that incorporate my translations into the vocal scores. In doing so, we hope to make the translations widely available to other companies. It's quite an undertaking. To date, there are over fifty full-length translations, plus fourteen one-acters. So far we've computerized about half.

Crawford: And are other companies using them?

Pippin: Increasingly so. About two hundred rentals to date. But as my translations are becoming better known, the market itself is steadily dwindling. Thanks largely to supertitles, opera



companies are going more and more into original language productions. I would like to think there is room for both. Consequently, my work has taken on the urgent quality of a crusade, possibly a last chance to preserve an endangered species--opera in English must be kept alive! It's up to us translators to come up with words that are worth singing.

Crawford: So important. Well, what would you say about the Pocket Opera audience at this point?

Pippin: One could hardly hope for a more enthusiastic or a better informed audience. But still, it's a relatively small one. Through careful planning, we manage to fill up the theatre for almost every performance. Thank goodness, we have a core of supporters whose loyalty has been heartwarming. I am constantly meeting people far from ancient who introduce themselves: "I've been following you and Pocket Opera since the Old Spaghetti Factory." Which leads me to realize that the audience back then, twenty years ago or more, was surprisingly youthful. Our audience has grown older, along with me. Also, one might suppose that that run-down back room was about the size of the Cow Palace.

Needless to say, we would love to reach out to a larger audience. This has become much more difficult because of an unfortunate change of policy on the part of the San Francisco daily papers. Both of them have drastically cut back on their coverage of the arts. During the seventies and eighties, the *Chronicle* employed three or four music critics; in the nineties they are reduced to one. This is a body blow to small arts organizations like ours and a disservice to a city that prides itself on maintaining a lively cultural scene. It has made us invisible, irrelevant, marginalized, no longer part of public discourse. And the smaller papers seem to have followed suit. Ten years ago we had about a dozen Bay Area critics who were vigorously, enthusiastically on our side. Since then, their reviews at best appear sporadically and rarely. Other groups, of course, suffer the same neglect. But it is cold comfort to know that we are not alone.

One happy event that I should mention. After being closed for several years of earthquake reinforcement, the marvelous, Venetian-like Florence Gould Theatre at the Palace of the Legion of Honor was reopened. Pocket Opera was invited to inaugurate the reopening--an event, let me add, that was not covered by either of the San Francisco dailies. Since then we have divided our season between the Temple and the Palace. From homelessness to two homes! What luxury! The Palace is surely one of the most spectacularly gorgeous, breathtaking

locations on the face of the earth. Just going there each week is an unfailingly exhilarating experience.

Crawford: Further goals?

Pippin: Perhaps not a goal, but a dream. In at least one major American city, I would someday like to see an opera house comparable to the English National Opera in London--an established company whose stated purpose will be the performance of opera in English.

In the meantime, I can be overwhelmingly grateful for the privilege of going my own way and doing what I love best to do. If it has fallen short of what could have been achieved--what hasn't?

There are so many people to whom I owe thanks, the list goes on and on. But let me single out a few. I want to thank Joan and Bob Shomler, who for years have turned out computerized printed editions of my translations, plus thousands of photographs taken at dress rehearsals and performances. Also Ted Helminski, who has made archival videos of most of the productions of the past ten years.

I want to give special thanks to Willa Berliner Anderson, our wardrobe coordinator, who insists that she is not a costumer. With lots of imagination, infinite care and practically no budget, she has always managed to come up with the look that connects with the spirit of the opera.

Special thanks to the staff and to the board members who have helped us weather the storms and crises. And to the hundreds of volunteers and Elsewhere members who have contributed so much in both time and money.

But most of all, I want to thank those who have worked the hardest and contributed the most--our singers. Let me mention a few of the outstanding performers of the past few years alone:

Karen Anderson (*Maria Padilla, Alcina, Agrippina*)  
 Andrea Baker, (*Ariodante, Xerxes*)  
 Elin Carlson (*Yanked from the Harem, Gang of Bandits, Ernani*)  
 Marcelle Dronkers (*Don Pasquale, Martha*)  
 Elspeth Franks (*Teseo, Agrippina, The Star*)  
 Sara Ganz (*Ariodante, Teseo*)  
 Margaret Genovese (*Bridge of Sighs, Abu Hassan*)  
 Jane Hammett (*Merry Widow, King for a Day, Tales of Hoffmann*)  
 Marla Kavanaugh (*Merry Widow, Orpheus in the Underworld*)

Ellen Kerrigan (*Rigoletto, Lucrezia Borgia, Mary Stuart*)  
 Estelle Kruger (*Daughter of the Regiment*)  
 Margaret Lisi (*Teseo, Cenerentola, Così fan Tutte*)  
 Rachel Michelberg (*Barber of Seville, Belle Helene, Carmen*)  
 Eileen Morris (*Don Giovanni, Magic Flute, Giulio Cesare*)  
 Svetlana Nikitenko (*Magic Flute, Agrippina*)  
 Donna Petersen (*Orpheus, Daughter of the Regiment*)  
 Emily Stern (*Martha, Tales of Hoffmann, King for a Day*)  
 Vicky Van Dewark (*Mary Stuart*)  
 Darla Wigginton (*Bluebeard*)

And some of the men:

Richard Cohan (*Merry Wives of Windsor, King for a Day*)  
 Todd Donovan (*Don Pasquale, King for a Day*)  
 William Gorton (*Rigoletto, Lucrezia Borgia, Mary Stuart*)  
 David Gustafson (*Martha, Magic Flute, Cenerentola*)  
 Mark Hernandez (*The Star, Bridge of Sighs, Hoffmann, Merry Widow*)  
 Michael Licciardello (*Gang of Bandits, Hoffmann, Ernani, Carmen*)  
 Roger McCracken (*Don Pasquale, Bartered Bride*)  
 Michael Mendelsohn (*Bluebeard, Bridge of Sighs, Soldier's Tale*)  
 Joseph Meyers (*Bartered Bride, Belle Helene, Abu Hassan*)  
 Shouvik Mondel (*Don Giovanni, Elixir of Love*)  
 Andrew Morgan (*The Star, Tales of Hoffmann*)  
 Baker Peeples (*Merry Widow*)  
 Robert Presley (*Barber of Seville, Lucrezia Borgia, Cenerentola*)  
 Ethan Smith (*Don Giovanni, Magic Flute, Martha*)  
 David Taft-Kekuewa (*Barber of Seville, Tales of Hoffmann*)  
 Michael Taylor (*Marriage of Figaro, Barber of Seville, Cenerentola*)  
 David Thompson (*Yanked from the Harem, Gang of Bandits*)  
 Richard Walker (*Tales of Hoffmann, Elixir of Love*)  
 Ralph Wells (*Gang of Bandits, Ernani*)

Let's let them have the last word.

## A FEW LYRICS

From THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, Cherubino, the pampered young page, heads off reluctantly to join the army. Figaro points out a few contrasts between the life he is leaving and the life that lies ahead.

Time to throw off the role of the lover;  
 Play no longer the fair young enchanter.  
 March away from the pastime and banter  
 Of the darling, the court cavalier.

Feast no more on a diet of dainties;  
 Leave behind masquerades and cotillions,  
 Conversation of sparkle and brilliance,  
 As you head for a soldier's career.

Say goodbye to fair complexion,  
 Pretty phrases, soft affection  
 And secret embraces.....

Time to throw off the role of the lover,  
 The despair of the fair and the bonny.  
 Drop the role of the young Don Giovanni,  
 Say goodbye to the court cavalier.

Into battle goes the dandy,  
 Sword at side and pistol handy,  
 Beard unshaven, pack on shoulder,  
 Weather freezing, getting colder,  
 New fiasco by the minute,  
 Leather purse but nothing in it.

Little need for velvet breeches  
 In the swamps and frozen ditches,  
 Ice and sweat upon your forehead,  
 Toil abundant, diet frugal,  
 Blare of trumpet, call of bugle.  
 Round your head the bullets whistle  
 As you plod through thorn and thistle  
 Toward the enemy frontier.

Say goodbye to silk and satin,  
 Sparkling wine, foods that fatten,  
 Dainty hands, smiling faces,  
 Tender words and secret embraces....

Time to throw off the role of the lover;

Play no longer the fair young enchanter;  
 March away from the pastime and banter  
 Of the lad whom the girls all adore.  
 Cherubino's off to battle!  
 Cherubino wins the war!

CHERUBINO in days of happier confusion:

I forget who I am, where I'm going,  
 Back and forth, cold and hot, never knowing.  
 With the girls I'm a ball of confusion;  
 With a woman I fall all apart.

Words of love or desire or affection  
 Stir my pulse and enflame my complexion.  
 And I've no choice  
 But then must give voice  
 To that yearning,  
 That sweet hunger dwelling deep in my heart.

Love, only love while waking!  
 Love, only love while sleeping!  
 I cry to meadows, mountains,  
 To flowers, fields and fountains,  
 To echo, breeze and zephyr.  
 My amorous song floats ever  
 And fades in the distant air.

And if there's no one near me,  
 With none around to hear me,  
 I speak to just myself of love,  
 Even if no one's there!

DON GIOVANNI at his most seductive:

DON GIOVANNI           Melting in soft surrender,  
                           Your pretty hand in mine,  
                           Not far away, in splendor,  
                           We there shall blend as one.

ZERLINA                I would, and yet I wonder.  
                           Your words that flow like wine,  
                           So soothing, smooth and tender,  
                           Are spoken perhaps in fun....

BOTH                    As one, we go invited



Along a pathway lighted  
 By love and love alone.  
 By love! By love! By love!

So hand in hand, as one,  
 We're off to lands unknown  
 Of love and love alone.

In RIGOLETTO, meet the ultimate male chauvinist. AKA the Duke of Mantua:

Women are one and all  
 Off again, on again,  
 Here now, then gone again,  
 Ruled by caprices,

Each a mere weathervane,  
 Spun by the breezes,  
 Shifting and turning,  
 Loving, then spurning;

Burning, then freezing,  
 Taunting and teasing,  
 Fair but most pleasing  
 Seen from afar.

Though I would credit all  
 Creatures of beauty,  
 Mozart once said it all:  
*COSI FAN TUTTE.*

Pity the worshipper  
 Prone to surrender;  
 Shame on the featherbrain  
 Stung by that gender.

Though I deplore them,  
 Try to ignore them,  
 Still I adore them  
 Just as they are.

In ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD, Public Opinion demands that Orpheus do the right thing:

Mad musician, cringe and cower!  
 Public Opinion is on your case.  
 Behind the scenes, I wield the power  
 From inner circles to outer space.

My counsel only fools dismiss 'n  
 When I speak the mighty listen:  
 Hold on, husband! Make no move  
 Until you know that I approve!

Rebellious poet, expect no mercy!  
 I shall haunt you and hunt you down.

With bad reviews and controversy  
I'll drive you snivelling out of town.

On the road, though not by choice,  
Night and day you'll hear my voice:  
Hold on, husband! Make no move  
Until you know that I approve!

Eurydice, abducted by no means unwillingly by Pluto, is finding Hades  
a decided disappointment:

My days are unbearably boring!  
Has Pluto become so blase?  
How long can he go on ignoring  
A girl who came such a long way?  
My spirits are sinking, not soaring.  
I notice in fact with dismay  
My husband looks better each day.

A word of advice to you ladies:  
Think twice before coming to Hades.

So eager to please as a lover,  
He promised to show me around,  
But now that the novelty's over  
He's nowhere in hell to be found.  
They say I have gone to the devil,  
Where sinners and satyrs abound.  
Believe me, it's not such a revel.

A word of advice to you ladies:  
Think twice before coming to Hades.

In THE MERRY WIDOW, the intoxication of Paris takes over:

To melody in waltz time, come recapture  
Days of springtime, wine of rapture.  
As the twirling progresses, the dancing floor spins  
To the silken caresses of violins.....

As you glide in a dream, in a trance,  
On a tide, flowing on with the dance,

You're atwirl in a world ever thrilling,  
Filled with the lift of romance.

To a tune sweeter yet than before,  
Arm in arm with the girl I adore,  
With a smile, with a sigh,  
In a spell, you and I  
Are alone on a crowded floor.....

In LA VIE PARISIENNE, the glamorous Metalla introduces the Swedish baron to the dangerous attractions of the Left Bank:

At the midnight chime the revelries start.  
As carriages empty the passageway fills.  
Young dandies and ladies, both equally smart,  
Come seeking adventure, excitement and thrills.

The flower of youth, a varied bouquet  
Of blonde and brunette with splashes of red,  
The plush and the plain, naive or blase,  
They flock here to savor the banquet outspread.

Some are bold and brassy, other pretend--oh!  
Who's the shy lassie that hides in the hall?  
Adagio at first, then rapid crescendo,  
The overture builds to a wild bacchanal.

Laughter and dance! Champagne poured in quantities;  
Couples crowd on the floor with space getting scarce.  
A few gather round the piano that accompanies;  
A grim game of chance is unfolding upstairs.

And the noise ascends, the tempest mounts higher  
As youth in full frenzy rides over the top.  
Is it pleasure or pain, this fury and fire,  
This fever that burns as if never to stop.

But all things must end; it's long after four.  
The sparkle and sport have turned bleary-eyed.  
Some stand half asleep, others sprawl on the floor;  
With yawns and long faces the revels subside.

Pale morning arrives, and welcome the dawn!  
The stragglers remain, but gone is the glee.  
The gallant full of swagger looks ashen and drawn;

The pert little number is gasping for tea.

The candle burnt out, they leave Mt. Parnasse,  
Hung over alike with love and champagne.  
The street-sweeper stops and stares as they pass,  
And he cries, "Oh, joy! To be young again!  
Oh, joy! Oh, joy! To be young again!"

Meet THE BARBER OF SEVILLE:

Bring on the barber, the man for the job! Make way!  
Rested and rollicking, ready to go! Nice day!

Ah, life is good to me, all milk and honey,  
Prestige and money,  
Scaling the ladder up to the top.

Hand is to Figaro, bravo, bravissimo, bravo!  
Versatile, vigorous, much in demand, hi ho!  
Favored by fortune and blessed by the gods,  
Bound for success, overcoming the odds.

Scissor and razor ready as needed,  
I am stampeded,  
Run to the ground.  
Ever at home with curler and comb,  
A finer profession is not to be found.

A generous ration of free conversation  
I give on occasion  
Trimming the hair.  
Soaping or lathering,  
I am for gathering  
Gossip and news for others to share.

Higher rewards come with the client:  
Gentlemen cordial, ladies compliant.

People pursuing me,  
Hailing, yoo-hooing me,  
Gender or station  
No limitation:  
Shorten the beard, heighten the color.  
Service outstanding  
They are demanding.

Falling all over, the public is calling.  
 So highly regarded, the barber bombarded,  
     Customers clamoring,  
     Hounded and hammering,  
     Ever so eager, oh!  
 Figaro, Figaro, Figaro!....

High over all, even bigger than Figaro,  
 Destiny favors the day of the dynamo.  
 Business booming, flowers are blooming,  
     Opening out.  
 Welcome the barber up and about.  
     Man of renown,  
 I'm talk of the town.

CARMEN gives the inside information about love:

Love at best is a bird in flight  
 That cares not what you do or say.  
 Call it back, and it's out of sight;  
 You point, it flies the other way.

Flatter, threaten or beat your breast,  
 No tears will make that bird obey.  
 When it's ready to leave the nest,  
 Nor you nor I can make it stay.  
     That's love! That's love!

A wayward child, a gypsy, too,  
 You men will meddle only if you dare.  
 Be cold to me, I burn for you,  
 But when I smolder, oh you men, beware!

Taken prisoner by surprise,  
 The startled bird will spread its wings.  
 Try to hold it and off it flies,  
 But when you want it least, it clings.

See it circle and circle round,  
 So often sought but seldom found.  
 Hold it fast and it flies away;  
 When wanted least, it's there to stay.  
     That's love! That's love





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# **EUGENE ONEGIN**

**BY**

# **TCHAIKOVSKY**

**English Version by Donald Pippin**



# CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Eugene Onegin**

**Larina, a widowed landowner.**

**Tatiana, her dreamy, romantically inclined daughter.**

**Olga, her more down-to-earth daughter.**

**Filipyevna, an aged nurse-maid, not as sharp as she used to be.**

**Lenski, a young poet, passionately in love with Olga.**

**Prince Gremin, a decidedly middle-aged nobleman.**

**Triquet, a Frenchman, also a poet, stretching the term somewhat.**

**Guillot, Onegin's servant.**

**Zaretski**

**A Captain**

**Peasants, guests, landowners, officers.**

**The action takes place upon a landed estate in Western Russia, and later in St. Petersburg.**

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## EUGENE ONEGIN

## TSCHAIKOVSKY

English Version by Donald Pippin

## ACT I ---- PART I

*Scene: a garden on the Larina estate. Madame Larina is seated under a tree preparing fruit for preserves, assisted by Filipyevna. From inside the house, a sweet duet is heard. The ladies listen for a while, and gradually drift into their own conversation and reminiscences, while the duet inside continues.*

OLGA &amp; TATIANA

Did you not hear  
The lonely shepherd lad  
Who sang of love,  
Of longing and of sorrow  
At break of day  
When woods and fields were silent,  
And filled the grove  
With music sweet and sad?

Did you not hear at break of morn  
The lonely song of love forlorn  
That filled the grove  
With plaintive music sweet and sad?

Did you not hear  
The shepherd lad  
That sang of love  
In tune so sad?

Did you not sigh  
When like the nightingale,  
Alone and shy,  
He sang of love and sorrow?

207  
And when the youth  
Stepped barefoot from the forest  
With anguish in his eye,  
His cheek so pale,  
Did you not sigh?

LARINA: That song I know — it's so familiar.  
How many years have hurried by!  
Do you recall? I sang it, too.

FILIPYEVNA: The good old days, indeed I do.

LARINA: Romantic novels were my passion.

FILIPYEVNA: The days we both were young and spry.

LARINA: Of course, unfit for girls my age,  
Though Princess Caroline, my cousin,  
Who kept me up on current fashion,  
Said Moscow found them all the rage.

FILIPYEVNA: I well remember  
The summer you became a bride.  
The suitor your parents wanted ....

LARINA: All so insane! All so absurd!

FILIPYEVNA: But in your heart, beyond a doubt,  
A dashing captain had won out.

LARINA: Ah, not a doubt! Him I preferred!

FILIPYEVNA: For him alone you pined and panted.

LARINA: So handsome! So nonchalant!  
A gambler, but a true gallant!

FILIPYEVNA: Indeed they were the good old days.

LARINA: I followed all the fads and follies ....

FILIPYEVNA: The queen of fashion!

So chic and smart, you set the pace.

LARINA:                    So chic and smart, I set the pace.  
And then, my own desires unheeded....

FILIPYEVNA:                To church, afraid to disobey!

LARINA:                    I wept as holy rites proceeded,  
My only thought to run away.

FILIPYEVNA:                But tears and heartbreak had to vanish ....  
You got your own estate to manage.  
In time you turned to house and home  
Which gave the helping hand you needed.

LARINA:                    In time I turned to house and home  
Which gave the helping hand I needed.

FILIPYEVNA:                Yes, God be praised!

BOTH: (*alternately*)        Routine and habit soon enough  
Replace romantic dreams of love.  
How true indeed!

LARINA:                    The froth, the frills I blush to mention!  
My furbelows, my book of verse  
Were soon forgotten.

FILIPYEVNA:                In their place,  
A household clamored for attention.  
As time went by, you settled down....

LARINA:                    To just a plain old dressing gown!  
My husband, though, was so devoted.  
So true and trusting, so good-hearted....

BOTH:                        Routine and habit soon enough  
Replace romantic dreams,  
Futile dreams of love.

*From offstage, a chorus of peasants is heard approaching.*

**LEADER:** At last! No more tiresome toil and sweat,  
Our work is done.

**PEASANTS:** No more toil and sweat, our work is done.

**LEADER:** No more bending over rows of grain  
In a broiling sun.

**PEASANTS:** No more we'll toil in a broiling sun.

**TOGETHER:** So now for rest and a day of fun.  
We'll put dull care and worries away.  
We'll put them away  
For a carefree holiday.

Cheers to you and your family!  
Health, long life and prosperity!  
We bring you sheaves gay and garlanded.  
All of our crops now are harvested.  
Now is the harvest home!

**LARINA:** Friends, many thanks! Hearty welcome!  
So glad you've come.  
Let's celebrate and have a merry song.

**PEASANTS:** So let us celebrate!  
Come, hurry up! Form a ring.  
Here is a day for singing, for dancing!  
All together! All together!

Leaves fall golden to the ground 'n  
Berries ripen on the mountain.

Fields with harvest wheat are spread. Oh,  
Sheep go grazing in the meadow.

On the bank beside the water  
Lives the miller and his daughter.

Striding down into the dell, oh  
Here's a husky, handsome fellow.

Bright blue eyes and curly hair, he  
Has lips tempting as a cherry.

When he calls upon the girl, he  
Cries, "Wake up! It's nice and early!"

As they stroll along the lazy river,  
Plover eggs he finds to give her.

She cries out, "Pray, what is this, sir?"  
When her lover tries to kiss her.

"Tell me why we have to wait," he  
Says, "till we are over eighty."

She replies, "We needn't linger  
Were a ring upon my finger."

"If you want to marry," said he,  
"Sweetheart, any time you're ready!"

In his manly arms he wrapped her.  
That's all till another chapter.

*During the song, Tatiana and Olga have appeared on the terrace, Tatiana with book in hand.*

TATIANA: Oh, how I love their song so full of spirit!  
I lose myself in listening  
And want to wander,  
To wander far away. . .

OLGA: Oh, Tanya! Tanya! You're way up in the clouds.  
How different we are!  
For when they sing I only think of dancing!

"Leaves fall golden to the ground 'n  
Berries ripen on the mountain."



I was not made for melancholy;  
No tears and far-off dreams for me,  
Nor gazing from a darkened window  
To sigh at cruel destiny.

What time for sorrow  
When each tomorrow  
A radiant dawn relights the sky?  
Of even temper,  
May or December,  
A fortune favored child am I.

My life is sweet, the days serene and fair.  
To take in all, too short the hours.  
For every seed of hope that flowers  
My heart provides sunlight and air.

LARINA: Well now, my pretty lambkin!  
So bright and full of song is my canary!  
And ready any time of day for dancing.  
Right, am I not?

FILIPYEVNA: Tatiana! Little pet! What is wrong?  
Are you not well today?

TATIANA: Now Nana! Don't get worried.

LARINA: *(to peasants)* We so enjoyed the song,  
Good friends and neighbors.  
You go take care of them.  
Filipyevna, see that they all get wine and cake.  
Again we thank you.

PEASANTS: Such hospitality!

*(They leave with Filipyevna.)*

OLGA: Ah, mother, see how pale Tatiana's getting.

LARINA: My dear! You do appear a little peaked.

TATIANA: I look the same as always.

Dear Mama, please don't worry.  
I am so involved in the book I am reading.

LARINA: (*laughing*)      Have I not warned you, darling?

TATIANA:                I cannot help but weep at their misfortunes.  
                              A pair of lovers so ill-fated!  
                              I am torn with pity!  
                              How much they're made to suffer!  
                              How much they must suffer!

LARINA:                Nonsense, Tanya!  
                              Now once upon a time,  
                              Like you, I'd read and weep,  
                              And all for nothing!  
                              It's only make-believe!  
                              I'm older now, and I have learned  
                              In real life the hero's plainer.  
                              And just as well!

OLGA:                    In real life you don't even notice  
                              That you still are in your apron.  
                              And what if Lenski came and saw you so?    (*laughs*)  
                              Ah! I hear wagon wheels! Lenski comes!

LARINA:                To pay a visit!

TATIANA:                He's not alone.

LARINA:                Who could it be?

FILIPYEVNA: (*returning*)      My dear Madame!  
                              It is our neighbor Lenski,  
                              And he has brought Onegin.

TATIANA:                Ah! I'd better run upstairs.

LARINA:                Now, now, Tatiana! Let's not be timid.  
                              Mighty God! My hair is simply a disgrace!

OLGA:                    Have someone show them in.

LARINA: (*to servant*)      Admit them! Hurry up!

*Onegin and Lenski enter, mid great excitement.*

LENSKI:                   Mesdames! My liberty you'll pardon.  
                              I brought a guest along.  
May I present to you Onegin, my good friend.

LARINA:                 A privilege! Do please sit down.  
                              My daughters I'd like to introduce.

ONEGIN:                 My warmest compliments!

LARINA:                 So shall we go within? Or . . .  
                              Or perhaps you'd rather  
                              Remain outside here in the open.  
I beg you ... don't stand on ceremony.  
                              We are neighbors,  
                              And you are both to feel at home.

LENSKI:                 Delightful spot! How much I love the garden,  
                              Shady and secluded, and yet so homey.

LARINA:                 Then stay here.  
But I must go inside to see about some supper.  
My girls will entertain you. I'll return!

*She leaves.*

QUARTET: *(sung more or less simultaneously)*

TATIANA:               Yes, all is true, my wait is over!  
                              My shining knight I recognize.  
The dreams that round my pillow hover  
Stand gathered here before my eyes.

By day, by night, in ardent fever,  
His face I'll see before me ever.  
A vision bright to so inspire  
My soul to glow in sacred fire.

OLGA:                   And so his friend Onegin comes a-calling!  
These coming weeks it will be topic number one,  
                              Oh, so enthralling!  
And guaranteed to raise a smile,

For won't the neighbors start to chatter,  
Inventing where they find no matter,  
Till Tanya's marching down the aisle.

The neighborhood will be diverted,  
Cry, "Oh, my dear! The way she flirted!"  
They'll have her in a little while  
In white and marching down the aisle!

ONEGIN: Which of the two would be Tatiana?

LENSKI: The quiet one with darker hair,  
Reserved and silent, seems to suffer . . .

ONEGIN: She has a rather charming air.  
But you're attracted to the other!  
Were I a fellow poet,  
I'd surely choose the one less fair.  
Your Olga I would not compare.

Madonna-like and unawakened,  
Her face is round and rather dull,  
So like the moon when seen in full,  
And shines serene, monotonous and vacant.  
Yes, I prefer the shy one . . .

LENSKI: Friends that we are, the way the way we differ!  
The wave and cliff, or ice and flame,  
Or prose and poetry  
Are more alike than you and I.

*Onegin and Tatiana, Lenski and Olga pair off.*

LENSKI: What rapture! What radiance!  
At last once more together!

OLGA: My dear, we parted only yesterday.

LENSKI: To think, so long ago!  
One solid day of separation!  
An eternity!

OLGA:                               Eternity! But what a big and dreadful word,  
All for a single day!

LENSKI:                            Not such a dreadful word  
With our love to sweeten it.

ONEGIN: *(conversing separately with Tatiana)*  
                                  There must be times  
                                  When life is dull and days are long  
                                  In such a quiet place,  
                                  No doubt delightful, but secluded.  
                                  The countryside has little to provide  
                                  By way of pleasure.

TATIANA:                         Oh, I'm fond of reading.

ONEGIN:                         Reading! A book can feed the mind and spirit,  
                                  But that alone is not enough  
                                  To make a steady diet.

TATIANA:                         I daydream as I stroll around the garden.

ONEGIN:                         And what is it you're dreaming of?

TATIANA:                         I fear it's always been my nature,  
                                  A habit even as a child.

ONEGIN:                         Then I would guess that you were born a dreamer,  
                                  The way I used to be myself . . .

*As Onegin and Tatiana withdraw, Lenski and Olga come back into focus.*

LENSKI:   *(with great warmth and passion)*  
                                  I adore you, my beloved Olga,  
                                  With a fire known only to the fevered poet,  
                                  A tortured soul that groans and sighs,  
                                  By day and night pursued and haunted,  
                                  By one delight, one sorrow taunted,  
                                  A flame that burns and never dies.

                                  A child, already I was captured,  
                                  Foretelling not of love's despair.

At hide-and-seek I grew enraptured,  
While you were blithe and unaware.  
'Twas here within this very grove  
That I became the slave of love.

You are life to me!  
And I yearn for you with the fire and force  
Known only to the poet.  
By a single passion driven,  
I descend to hell from heaven,  
Now enchanted, now tormented.

You are life to me!  
My desire for you a driving force,  
A fervor none but poets recognize,  
A faith that makes the mountains move,  
A flame that purifies.  
My heart and soul I hurl into the fire of love.

OLGA:                   In this protected spot it's true,  
We both were born and here we grew,  
And all along our parents knew  
That one fine day I'd marry you ---  
I and you.

LENSKI:                I adore you, worship only you.

*Larina and Filipyevna re-emerge from the house.*

LARINA:              So there you are! But have you seen Tatiana?

FILIPYEVNA:           Together near the lake  
The two were strolling.  
I'll go and call this minute.

LARINA:              Time to gather friends into the dining room.  
Around the table we'll share the blessings God has given.  
(to Lenski)           Oh, please, sir! Do come inside.

LENSKI:               I follow gladly.

*Larina, Lenski and Olga go inside the house. Onegin and Tatiana re-enter.*



ONEGIN:

My uncle, stupid but respected,  
From age and illness fell apart,  
But would not stand to be neglected,  
Which shows he was in some ways smart.

At least he set a good example,  
But Lord! The way his mind would ramble!  
A captive bedside slave was I,  
While wond'ring would he never die.

*They, too, enter the house. Filipyevna, who has been trying in vain to eavedrop, remains.*

FILIPYEVNA:

My little sparrow!  
With drooping winglet she tags along  
And dares not make a murmur.  
So shy and timid! Or perhaps  
She finds her guest  
A man with lots and lots to tell her . . .

*She, too, goes inside side. The stage is empty and the scene ends.*

## ACT I --- SCENE II

*Scene: Tatiana's bedroom. It is night, a few weeks later. Tatiana, in a white night dress, is with Filipyevna.*

FILIPYEVNA:

There! No more talk tonight.  
Long after bedtime.  
Sleep, for tomorrow morning bright and early  
We're up for mass.

TATIANA:

I'm wide awake!  
So hot and humid!  
Do raise the window,  
Then sit with me.

FILIPYEVNA:

What is the matter, child?

**TATIANA:** It's nothing .... Tell more about the days of old.....

**FILIPYEVNA:** What can I tell you? I am thinking hard.  
I once knew stories by the yard,  
Of evil spirits, fair maidens, too,  
And some made up, but some were true.  
They've left me . . . Now my head is empty . . .  
My stories I've forgotten.  
Ah! How long, how long ago it seems!  
A lifetime . . .

**TATIANA:** Do remember, Nana.  
Back in those days so long ago,  
Were you in love? Say yes or no!

**FILIPYEVNA:** Oh, mercy, Tanya! You are dreaming!  
Lord! I'd not even heard of love.  
My husband's mother, saints above!  
She'd chase me out for so blaspheming.

**TATIANA:** But how then did you come to marry?

**FILIPYEVNA:** God willed it, so it had to be, dear.  
It happened when I turned thirteen.  
My Vanya I had never seen.  
No fuss, no ceremony wasted.  
The broker came, a bargain struck,  
And everybody wished me luck.  
That night, the bitter tears I tasted! . . .

Then were my long braids untied,  
And at church next day I was the bride,  
And then I went to live with strangers ---  
You haven't heard a single word!

**TATIANA:** Ah, Nana! Nana! Can I say it?  
I'm in torment!  
I'm so afraid of what's to come,  
I weep, and shall forever weep.

**FILIPYEVNA:** My dearest child! Lie down and sleep.  
Have mercy on her, mighty Lord!  
Lie down and let me sprinkle holy water.

You're all afire!

TATIANA: I am not ill . . . I've got to say it . . .  
I . . . am in love!  
Now go away . . . Be kind and go . . .  
I am in love . . .

FILIPYEVNA: My baby!

TATIANA: Now go and leave me to myself.  
First give me pen and ink and paper . . .  
My writing desk . . .  
I'll go to sleep soon.  
Good night.

FILIPYEVNA: Good night. God keep you, Tanya.

*She leaves, Tatiana remains for a long time deep in thought, then rises, agitated but resolved.*

TATIANA: So near the precipice, drawn onward,  
Before I plunge to my own destruction,  
Oh, let me hope, however blindly!  
Oh, let me taste the wine of rapture!

I down the fatal draft, sweet potion  
That wakens longing and desire.  
His face, his form I cannot flee;  
Onward my tempter beckons me.  
I follow where my tempter beckons me.

*She sits at the writing desk, writes a little, then stops.*

No .... not at all .... I'll start all over.  
What agony! No, too insane!  
I cannot even start . . .

*She resumes writing after tearing up what she had written previously.*

To you I write .... and why say more?  
Does not the fact speak plain enough?  
My heart I place within your power  
To crush to bits with a rebuff.

Yet if you feel, however slight,  
A drop of pity for my plight,  
You'll not disdain this darkest hour.

In vain I've struggle at concealing,  
Vowed never to confide  
The pain past hope of healing,  
Bitter shame, loss of pride.  
Within my heart until it turned to dust  
My secret I would hide  
Forever buried.

But ah! The tempest tears apart my very soul;  
This raging fire has spread beyond control.  
For good or ill, I must!  
I must express my feeling.

Our distant door why did you choose to cross?  
At peace, in quiet isolation,  
I never would have felt the loss,  
Nor shed a tear of thwarted passion.  
Once past the years of green emotion,  
I would be satisfied --- who knows? ---  
In course of time to wed another,  
To live content as wife and mother,  
As tranquil as the river flows.

Absurd! No, none could have nor even claim  
What I cannot call my own.  
Decreed by fate, the will of heaven,  
My heart and soul are yours alone.

No, all my life for you I've waited;  
Since time first began have I been yours.  
By God on high was I created  
To love you as long as life endures.

Blessed in a dream did I rejoice,  
For there I saw your image clear,  
Warm eyes to me forever dear,  
And heard the music of your voice.

A dream? No dream, I'll tell you why.  
When you appeared .... I knew for certain ....  
I recognized you.  
I longed to cry aloud:  
"There he is! There he is!"

My sorrows had you not befriended?  
Were you not present in my prayer?  
Were not to you my arms extended  
When to the poor and sick I tended?  
Were you not there?

Soft, from the limpid dark appearing,  
Did not you whisper words endearing  
To comfort me in time of need?  
A dream enchanted, pure and golden,  
Am I not much to you beholden,  
My prince upon a snow-white steed?

Are you my hope and preservation,  
Or evil serpent of temptation?  
Resolve my doubt, oh love, reply!  
Oh, tell me if I go misguided,  
My dream a fair but phantom lie,  
If we must tread on paths divided . . .

Be as it may, my hopes and fears,  
My life entire I've here imparted.  
Do not betray these burning tears.  
On you I now rely  
To keep my secret guarded.

Consider how alone am I,  
So far from human understanding.  
From sheer fatigue I'm nearly fainting;  
Condemned to silence, I would die.  
I can but wait for your reply,  
Some indication . . .

A word from you decides my fate;  
That single word I now await,  
The hope that heals my heart,  
Or ends my dream in desolation.

I close, but dare not even read.  
Oh, be not angry or disgusted!  
In fear, and yet in faith, I plead:  
Receive the heart I've here entrusted.

Ah! Dawn is breaking.  
The morning sun dispels the stormy night.  
There pipes the shepherd ....  
All else at rest,  
Except inside me!

*Filipyevna returns.*

FILIPYEVNA: My sweet, it's time to rise, wake up!  
Why look, she's up and dressed already!  
My bright and chipper turtle dove!  
Last night you seemed unwell, my love.  
Now, God be thanked, you're looking calm and steady.  
Of chill or fever not a trace.  
The poppies bloom upon your face.

TATIANA: Ah, nurse! I ask a special favor.

FILIPYEVNA: I'm happy, child, to be of use.

TATIANA: If only, only I were braver!  
Now listen .... Please do not refuse.

FILIPYEVNA: Speak out, my dear, I'm flattered by it.

TATIANA: Then send your grandson on the quiet,  
And have him take this note to O.  
To him, our neighbor, have him go,  
But not a soul on earth must know it.  
He's not to say from whom or where it came.

FILIPYEVNA: My dear, you haven't told his name!  
I'm old; my wits begin to show it.  
So many neighbors live around  
I couldn't even start to count.  
Who is it? Who is it?  
Speak out and say his name.



**TATIANA:** Are you so dull you cannot guess it?

**FILIPYEVNA:** My dear, I'm old and such a dunce.  
I'm not so bright, I must confess it,  
No, not so sharp as I was once.  
When master commanded  
I never kept him waiting.

**TATIANA:** Dear Nana! Please, no more debating!  
But little wit's required, God knows,  
To figure out to whom my letter goes.

**FILIPYEVNA:** Perhaps it could be . . . .  
Be sweet, my child, and do not frown or scold;  
It's all a part of growing old.

**TATIANA:** Oh, send him, send him to Onegin's house,  
Onegin's house, Onegin's house!  
Oh, send him to Onegin with my letter.

**FILIPYEVNA:** I shall attend.  
But why's your cheek again so pallid?

**TATIANA:** No matter, nurse, of no concern.  
I await your grandson's swift return!

*Tatiana finally succeeds in getting the nurse to leave. She herself remains, pensive and anxious.*

## ACT I — PART III

*Scene: another part of the garden. Country girls in the background are gathering berries among the bushes.*

COUNTRY GIRLS:      Gather, maidens! Beauties all!  
                                 Come when pipe and fiddle call.  
                                 Come to frolic, sport and play.  
                                 Chase youth's golden hours away.

                                 Sing the merry song again  
                                 Till its echoes fill the plain,  
                                 Lure the farmer lad, perchance  
                                 Lead him on to join our dance.

                                 Having caught him in our snare,  
                                 Open war we'll then declare.  
We'll surround him, show our stripe,  
                                 Pelter him with cherries ripe,  
                                 Huckleberries, currants red,  
                                 Nuts and acorns on his head.

                                 Teach the lad a thing or two,  
                                 Not to spy on what we do.  
Back he goes the way he came,  
                                 Not so prone to spoil a game.

*Tatians enters in great haste, then stops to listen.*

TATIANA:                      He comes! He! Onegin!  
                                 I tremble! I shudder!  
                                 I am fire and ice!  
                                 What can he think?

                                 Why did I yield.  
Give way to cry of heart and soul,  
Release the reins of self-control?  
Why did I send that dreadful letter?  
Too well I know, silence were better.

He comes to mock my naked pain.  
He loves me not; I wrote in vain.  
Help, kindly God! My tempter beckons.  
Forsake me not!

The time .... draws closer ....  
I hear his step .... He comes!

*Onegin enters. He speaks with dignity, calmly but coldly.*

ONEGIN:           You wrote to me .... wherefore deny it?  
A sincere, naive and innocent confession  
Of idealistic youthful passion.  
Your letter gratefully I read,  
In fact with feelings long thought dead,  
Emotions that were merely sleeping.

But pretty praise is not my aim;  
As you were frank, I'll be the same,  
With perfect candor quite in keeping.  
Without reserve I'll speak my mind;  
You then may judge, if so inclined.

TATIANA:           (So frosty! Such an answer! So degrading!)

*She collapses onto the bench. Onegin proceeds with continued calm.*

ONEGIN:           If marriage were my inclination,  
Domestic bliss my chosen lot.  
My will to increase the population,  
I would not hesitate a jot.  
Then I should be well satisfied  
To seek no further for a bride.

But such delight I leave untasted,  
That joy so foreign to my soul.  
On me is your perfection wasted;  
I play a less deserving role.

For us, the path would lead to sorrow  
I neither choose to beg nor borrow.  
Though love's a blessing, so we're told,  
Through custom does the heart grow cold.

No, not a pathway strewn with roses,  
For once the ecstasies are past,  
The dull remains alone will last.  
The dreams of love, like any other,  
No earthly power can restore.  
Love I can offer as a brother,  
A wiser brother,  
And yet who knows? Perhaps still more.

Accept advice meant not unkindly;  
In future, learn to love less blindly.  
Be careful! Be cautious!  
You may come to harm.

*As he continues, the country girls repeat their chorus from a distance.*

Another man might take advantage.  
Be careful!  
Youth and candor yet  
May lead to sorrow and regret.

*He offers his arm to Tatiana, who looks at him imploringly. In a state of near collapse, she takes his arm and they slowly go out together.*

## ACT II — PART I

*Scene: the Larina living room. A birthday party for Tatiana is in progress.*

**GUESTS:**  
Joy and delight!  
A true feast out of fable!  
And dancing for the young and able.  
What a night! A brilliant ball!  
Rich, bountiful table.  
A splendid sight! Complete delight!  
Come, ladies, gather all!  
What a banquet! What a table!  
Come sing, come dance!  
Hearty cheers for the brilliant ball!

**MEN:**  
Here in the country we seldom encounter  
Such a magnificent festive affair.  
I'm for the simple delights of the hunter;  
Give me the horses, the hounds and the hare.

**WOMEN:**  
Fine thing! The sport that they find so delightful!  
This dashing through forest of thicket and thorn.  
Exhausted and weary, it's homeward by nightfall,  
With only a shrug for us ladies forlorn.

**YOUNGER GIRLS:**  
Dear Captain Petrovich.  
Such danceable music!  
Professional orchestra!

**CAPTAIN:**  
Excellent! One should take advantage.

**GIRLS:**  
Were partners available .....

**CAPTAIN:**  
You need look no further!  
Let's give it a whirl.

*Onegin dances with Tatiana. Others observe.*

**WOMEN:**  
Look at them! Look at them!  
The lovebirds are dancing.  
The sweet bridal couple!

She's not hard to suit.  
Too bad for poor Tanya!  
He's smooth on the surface ....  
A monster beneath it.  
A gambler to boot!

*Onegin passes near the women, to overhear their conversation.*

A boor! Ill-mannered, haughty, *and*  
He disdains to kiss a lady's hand.  
A liberal, too; prefers red wine.  
Thank God, the man's no friend of mine!

ONEGIN:               Such admiration! Such flattery!  
                          The barnyard cackle of public opinion!  
I deserve it for coming, but who inveigled me  
                          To such a backwoods ball?  
                          My friend, it's thanks to you!  
Your little service, Lenski, I'll repay!  
                          I shall play up to his Olga  
                          And drive him to the brink.

*Olga approaches, closely followed by Lenski.*

Here she comes .... Allow me!

LENSKI:               You promised me this dance, my dear.

ONEGIN:               That is what you think!

*He sweeps off with Olga, leaving Lenski flabbergasted.*

LENSKI:               Incredible! My eyes deceive me!  
                          Olga! This I can't believe!

GUESTS:               All for pleasure! Hail to the host!  
                          Let's be merry! Fabulous feast!  
                          Night we'll long remember.  
                          A feast we'll not forget,  
                          By far the finest yet.  
A night we'll long remember with delight!  
                          All for pleasure!



*Lenski approaches Olga, who has just finished dancing with Onegin.*

LENSKI:                   Do I deserve to bear the brunt of mockery?  
                              Oh, Olga! How you taunt and torture me!  
                              What have I done?

OLGA:                    And what have I,  
                              That you find to criticize?

LENSKI:                You dance the waltzes, mazurkas, the ecossaises  
                              All with Onegin.  
                              When I come begging, I get the brush off.

OLGA:                   You're simply being childish.  
                              You have no cause to feel upset.

LENSKI:                No! Not the slightest cause!  
                              Am I supposed to watch, never bat an eye,  
                              While you proceed to laugh and flirt and play coquette?  
                              I saw his arm around you,  
                              I saw him press your hand.  
                              I'm not so blind!

OLGA:                   Blinded by foolish jealousy!  
                              A mountain from a molehill.  
                              A harmless bit of fun .... He's rather nice.

LENSKI:                Rather nice!  
                              Oh, Olga, you no longer love me.

OLGA:                   Stop talking nonsense.

LENSKI:                No, you never loved me.

*Onegin approaches.*

                              But the next one won't you dance with me?

ONEGIN:                No, with me!  
                              You gave your word and now must keep it.

OLGA:                   I intend to keep it!  
                              Serves him right to suffer --- so unreasonable!

LENSKI:

Olga!

OLGA:

Not on your life!  
But look, the ladies step this way  
To bring Monsieur Triquet.

ONEGIN:

Bring who?

OLGA:

A Frenchman, now become a neighbor.

WOMEN:

Monsieur Triquet! Monsieur Triquet!  
Oh, sing us, please, your couplet.

TRIQUET:

A small couplet? Oh, very well.  
But where be charming Mademoiselle?  
For I insist she stand by me.  
I dedicate my song to she.

*Tatiana. reluctantly, and with great embarrassment, becomes the center of a circle.*  
WOMEN:

Over here! Over here!

TRIQUET:

Aha! Voila! Here be today ze queen.  
Mesdames, two verses now I sing.  
No interrupt, except between.

*He sings the first verse in French, with much emotion.*

GUESTS:

Translate! Translate, Monsieur Triquet.  
We want to know the meaning  
Of your enchanting roundelay.

TRIQUET:

Queen of our hearts this happy day,  
Fairest of flowers on display,  
Contemplate her beauty while you may.

Star that illuminates the night,  
May your soft glow continue bright.  
Sending forth a gentle ray of light.

A ray! A ray!  
Forever shine on us, Tatiana!  
A ray! A ray!  
Forever shine, Tatiana!

**GUESTS:**                    **Bravo! Bravo, Monsieur Triquet!**  
                                  **For now we know the meaning**  
                                  **Of your enchanting roundelay.**

**CAPTAIN:**                    **Messieurs! Mesdames!**  
                                  **Your places if you please!**  
                                  **The cotillion is about to start.**  
                                  **Your places, please!**

*After dancing a turn with Olga, Onegin seats her, then pretends to have just noticed Lenski*

**ONEGIN:**                    **So you're not dancing, Lenski?**  
                                  **There you brood like a tragic Hamlet.**  
                                  **What's the rub?**

**LENSKI:**                    **You ask! I'm all right.**  
                                  **Indeed, I much admire**  
                                  **Your fine display of friendship.**

**ONEGIN:**                    **Now come, come! Your bitter tone**  
                                  **Is truly quite uncalled for.**  
                                  **Have I offended you?**

**LENSKI:**                    **Offended? Not a particle!**  
                                  **I merely doff my hat to such finesse,**  
                                  **Your gallant flow of words that stirs the frail sex,**  
                                  **That sweeps them off their feet**  
                                  **With no jot of scruple.**

**No, not satisfied to see Tatiana suffer,**  
                                  **Out of loyal friendship**  
                                  **Now you try to lure away my bride.**  
                                  **You play upon her trust,**  
                                  **Intending only to scoff at her.**  
                                  **What a noble friend!**

**ONEGIN:**                    **I? You can't be serious.**

**LENSKI:**                    **Oh, can't I?**  
                                  **So now you would insult me?**  
                                  **From robbery you turn to ridicule!**

**GUESTS:**                   What's the trouble?   What's the trouble?

**LENSKI:**                   Onegin!   You are no friend of mine!  
                                The tie that bound us  
                                Consider torn to ribbons.  
                                Sir!   You are beneath contempt!

**GUESTS:**                   Born out of nothing,  
                                Their dispute grows by the minute.  
                                From a trickle it enlarges  
                                To become a raging torrent.

**ONEGIN:**                   You're much mistaken  
                                And your charge does me wrong.  
                                It's too absurd.  
                                Furthermore, we're stirring up attention.  
                                I never tried to steal  
                                Or sweep away a girlish heart,  
                                Nor shall I in the future,  
                                So that is that.

**LENSKI:**                   Then what about the way you stroked her hand,  
                                The way you whispered  
                                That brought blushes to her cheek?  
                                What scheme were you concocting?

**ONEGIN:**                   Do stop it!   Raving madness!  
                                And people listening!

*Lenski by now is completely beside himself.*

**LENSKI:**                   What is that to me?  
                                Insult I do not take,  
                                And satisfaction I insist upon!

**GUESTS:**                   Come, tell us what is brewing.  
                                Why this loud and ugly quarrel?

**LENSKI:**                   Just this:   I merely ask my former friend  
                                To clarify and explain his gross behavior,  
                                And he replies with flippancy.  
                                I'm now demanding  
                                That he accept my challenge.

**LARINA:**

**A challenge! Heaven spare us!  
And in my house of all places!**

**ENSEMBLE**

**LENSKI:**

**In your own house .... I remember ....  
It was here that my childhood unfolded,  
Where the hours flowed swift on a stream.  
It was here as a man I exulted  
In a love that was rapture supreme.**

**But today to my grief I am learning  
That real life is no fond make-believe,  
Faith and honor mere words without meaning,  
And true friendship a mask to deceive;**

**That a maiden as fair as an angel,  
Pure and sweet as a morning in May,  
Bears inside her the soul of a demon  
That entices, then snatches away.**

**My darling, a fool was I for doubting!  
My angel so blameless!  
The scoundrel, he only will suffer.**

**ONEGIN:**

**I do regret, when all is weighed,  
The shabby role I have played.  
His youthful passion, tortured, tender,  
Unfeelingly I've torn asunder.**

**To a foolish man I yet hold dear  
I should have been far less free and cavalier.  
Such falsity to one who trusted!  
I stand dishonored, that is clear.  
Too far his temper I have tested.  
Affection and friendship I have betrayed.**

**Comes my repentance all to late,  
For satisfaction I may have to render.**

**TATIANA:**

I am bewildered, wildly jealous  
At his behavior so cruel and callous.  
A fire of yearning burns deep inside me despite.  
Brutal fate with a fiendish delight  
Has placed an icy hand upon my fevered heart.

Ah! So lost am I!  
Yet I cannot complain.  
On his account my life I'd offer.  
Sweet on his account to die.

Devoured by furies that spare not,  
I falter, I perish, yet care not.  
Ah, to die for love is blessedness,  
To end forever my dire distress.

**OLGA & LARINA:**

I fear that so enflamed a lover  
Will come to grief before it's over.  
So hot and hasty, oh these men!  
Quick-tempered as they've always been,  
Abrupt and ever prone to quarrel,  
So prone to fight.

**OLGA:**

By jealous pangs is he assaulted,  
But not for this should I be faulted, not I!

**OLGA & LARINA:**

For be it remembered,  
He's hasty, hot-tempered.  
Like all men, he's hasty, hot-tempered.

**GUESTS:**

Ah, poor Lenski! Too impetuous!  
In flow of blood must it be ended?  
Or can their quarrel yet be mended?  
(With pistols and bullets the quarrel may end.)

Hasty and hot! Young, foolish men!  
But thus blind youth has always been.  
For be it remembered,  
They're hasty, hot-tempered.  
Like all men, they're hasty, hot-tempered.



**ONEGIN:**                    You need but give the word. I'm ready.  
                              I have heard you out.  
                              Oh, blinded fool! Oh, blinded fool!  
                              A lesson might enlighten you a little.

**LENSKI:**                    Tomorrow morning!  
                              We'll then find out who learns the lesson.  
                              A fool I well may be,  
                              But you are a scoundrel and a traitor!

**ONEGIN:**                    Another word, sir, and I will kill you.

**GUESTS:**                    Scandal and crime!  
                              Headlong to bloodshed and horror!  
                              Can no one prevent it?  
                              We're angry, dumbfounded, revolted!  
                              No fighting! No killing!  
                              Have exits all bolted.  
                              Truce to bloodshed! Truce to horror!  
                              Stop them! Somebody!

**OLGA:**                    Oh, Lenski! Oh, I beg you! I implore you!

**LENSKI:**                    My Olga! Olga! Goodby, goodby!

**GUESTS:**                    Bound for bloodshed!

## ACT II --- PART II

*Scene: a bleak winter landscape at daybreak. Lenski, seated on the ground, waits reflectively while Zaretski paces impatiently*

ZARETSKI:               Well, Lenski, has your opponent overslept?  
                                  Or retracted?

LENSKI:                       We can count on him.

ZARETSKI:               I think it rather rude to keep us waiting.  
                                  It's after six, the hour agreed.  
                                  For death, a man should not be late.

*Zaretski goes out to investigate. Lenski remains seated*

LENSKI:                       My hope, my youth,  
                                  So soon have you departed!  
                                  Oh, warmth of spring, forever gone!

*He rises and comes forward*

What comes before this day is over?  
Beyond the veil of nature's cover  
In vain I seek the mystery.  
No matter! What's to be will be.

Should death enfold me in his keeping,  
Or should the bullet pass me by,  
God wills it --- thus to live or die,  
A time for waking and for sleeping.  
He sends the dawning ray of light;  
He sends the shrouded dark of night.

The morning star in sparkling splendor  
Again will crown the plains beneath;  
Perhaps by nightfall I shall enter  
The cold and solemn halls of death  
Wherein the youthful poet's lyric  
Outlives him but a meager hour,  
So soon the world forgets.  
But you, you, Olga? . . .

If to my grave you come to lay a flower.  
To shed a tear or pay a duty,  
Remember: one who loved here lies,  
Whose song forever glorifies  
The wonder of your mortal beauty.

Remember then the love I bear,  
My hope, my blessing and reward!  
Oh, crystal light! Oh, breath of air!  
Exalted, cherished and adored!

Oh, come to me, and here abide  
Forevermore!  
I call to you, my darling and my bride!  
Oh, come! Oh, come!  
Turn not away but here my call:  
My sacred bride, my life, my all!

Oh, hope! Oh, youth!  
Oh, where have you departed?  
Oh, warmth of spring,  
Forever and forever gone!

*Zaretski approaches, as Onegin appears, accompanied by his servant, Guillot.*

ZARETSKI: Ah, finally! But who's the fellow with him?  
He's new to me.

ONEGIN: I hope I've not detained you.  
My negligence you'll pardon.

ZARETSKI: Your second? Who, sir, have you picked?  
These matters have to be correct.  
On form I take the firm position;  
It can't be done just anyhow.  
The slack approach we can't allow.  
We'll stick to custom and tradition ---  
The proper way to kill a friend.

ONEGIN: Sir, your concern I commend.  
My second here, allow me: Monsieur Guillot.  
I trust that you have no objection;

An honest chap as people go,  
Though frankly not of rank and title ---  
A point I don't consider vital.

*Guillot bows with utmost formality; Zaretski responds coldly.*

ONEGIN: (to Lenski)                      So shall we start?

LENSKI:                                      If you are ready.

*Guillot and Zaretski withdraw to discuss arrangements. Onegin and Lenski sing alternately, not looking at each other..*

LENSKI & ONEGIN:                      My foe!  
   Our friendly ties all sundered,  
   Affection torn up by the roots.  
Till now have we not shared a hundred  
Fond pastimes, pleasures and pursuits?

   No longer loving, roused in anger,  
Opposed, we meet as foe and stranger,  
Life's precious blood prepared to shed,  
So death might claim one or the other's.

   Ah, could we not laugh it off instead,  
Before our hands are stained in red,  
In solid friendship part as brothers?  
No! No! No! No!

*Zaretski and Guillot have measured the distances and loaded the pistols. The principals are positioned and handed the pistols. All is done in silence.*

ZARETSKI:                                      And now step forward.

*Zaretski claps his hands three times. The adversaries step forward without aiming. They raise their pistols, a shot is fired. Lenski staggers and falls. Onegin and Zaretski rush forward.*

ONEGIN:                                      Dead?

ZARETSKI:                                      Dead!

*Onegin in despair covers his face with his hands.*

## ACT III — PART I

*Scene, an elegant ballroom in St. Petersburg, several years later. After a grand Polonaise, Onegin is seen standing apart, brooding.*

ONEGIN:

Eternal boredom!  
Social glitter, bustle and excitement  
Only enflame still further  
The past I can't forget.

Since having killed the friend I treasured,  
I flounder aimlessly askew.  
At twenty six, I still pursue  
A shallow life that's all too leisured.

Uprooted, minus wife and home,  
Abroad in foreign towns I roam,  
Aimless, but pausing not to ponder,  
My stabs at work a total loss.  
Possessed by a constant urge to wander,  
I bear a strange and lonely cross.

It drove me on. My native land and  
My own estate I soon abandoned.  
From each familiar hedge and tree  
A bleeding corpse stared back at me.

In travel, searching and exploring  
In vain for solace and relief,  
I soon discovered to my grief  
That novelty is just as boring.

Homeward returning, here I skip  
To a ballroom, barely off the ship.

*Another dance, a lively schottische, follows. Prince Gremin then enters, Tatiana holding his arm.*

CHORUS:

The Princess Gremina!  
A pleasure! An honor!

Do point her out.  
You can't mistake her.  
She's standing by the table there.  
Has she not elegance to spare?

ONEGIN:                   Is that Tatiana? Truly? No!  
How? From the dreary backwoods county,  
Can this be she?  
The girl I knew?  
The regal air! The graceful manner!  
The refinement!  
A queen with royal retinue!

TATIANA: *(to some of the party)*

Who is that man beside my husband  
Whose back is turned?

CHORUS:                   An idle dreamer!  
A man of eccentricities.  
A foreign traveller  
Now back from overseas,  
The name's Onegin.

TATIANA:                   Onegin?

CHORUS:                   Someone known to you?

TATIANA:                   A neighbor that I barely knew.  
(Oh, heaven! Bolster up my heart  
And help me conquer this commotion!)

ONEGIN: *(to Gremin)* Oh, tell me, Prince, what woman's that?  
The one with air of such distinction  
Who entertains the diplomat?

GREMIN:                   Aha! You must be fresh from travel!  
Perhaps you lead a sheltered life.

ONEGIN:                   Pray tell me who?

GREMIN:                   In short, my wife.



ONEGIN: I'd never guessed! I'd no idea!  
Long married?

GREMIN: Two years or so.

ONEGIN: She was? . . .

GREMIN: The Larin girl, Tatiana.  
You knew her once?

ONEGIN: Quite long ago.

GREMIN: The touch of love, though light and tender,  
Compels all mortals to surrender.  
It takes the young in summer's rage  
And taps alike on ripened age.

Those who know not its full extent  
Are robbed of life's most fragrant scent.  
The range and depth of my devotion  
Are wider, deeper than the ocean.

Ill-starred, my ship had run aground.  
My dearest Tanya then I found.  
The sun emerged, the clouds retreated;  
In her, my purpose and my goal I saw completed.

Mid worldly cunning, affectation,  
Mid smiles intended to deceive,  
The promises of short duration,  
The hearts worn lightly on the sleeve;

Mid hypocrites that pass for pious,  
Mid solemn bores that petrify us,  
Mid flirts that vie for the response  
Of rich and elderly gallants;

Mid verdicts callous, cold and cruel,  
Of ugly vanity and spleen.  
Mid rancors hid behind a screen  
Of shallow talk and verbal duel,

Tatiana's virtues shine the more,  
A star refulgent, ever glowing,  
A star I worship and adore.  
Toward her and paradise  
I bear a cup that's overflowing.

The touch of love, though light and tender,  
Compels all mortals to surrender.  
It takes the young in summer's rage  
And taps alike on ripened age.

Those who know not its full extent  
Are robbed of life's most fragrant scent.  
The range and depth of my devotion  
Are wider, deeper than the ocean.

Ill-starred, my ship had run aground.  
My dearest Tanya then I found.  
The sun emerged, the clouds retreated;  
In her, my purpose and my goal I saw completed.

So do come over and be introduced.

*He takes Onegin over to Tatiana.*

My love, allow me to present you  
To a distant relative and friend, Onegin.

TATIANA: *(with apparent composure)*

Indeed a pleasure.  
But then, of course, we've met before.

ONEGIN: In the country, years ago.

TATIANA: And meanwhile, did you remain and settle down?

ONEGIN: Oh, no. I'm just returning  
From years of travel.

TATIANA: You arrived? . . .

ONEGIN:

This morning.

TATIANA: (*to Gremin*)      Dearest, if you are ready . . . .

*Taking Gremin's arm, she leaves, returning the salutations of the guests. Onegin follows her with his eyes.*

ONEGIN:

Is this indeed the same Tatiana?  
The awkward child I deigned to scold,  
To give advice, correct but cold?  
The country girl I was chastizing  
With bits of pompous moralizing?

She wrote to me, cast off disguise;  
And what she offered I rejected.  
But now can I believe my eyes?  
A transformation! Such a prize!

What captures me? A waking dream!  
What feeling stirs within my breast,  
Till now withdrawn and self-possessed?  
Impatience? Jealousy? Remorse?  
Or is it love that runs full force?

No, not a doubt of it! I love her  
With all the ecstasy of youthful fire!  
Oh, let me hope, however blindly!  
Oh, let me taste the wine of rapture!

I down the fatal draft, sweet potion  
That wakens longing and desire.  
Her face, her form I ever see.  
Onward, my angel beckons me!  
I follow where my angel beckons me!

*He rushes off as the dance begins anew.*

## ACT III — PART II

*Scene, a reception room in the Gremin house. A few days later.*

*Tatiana enters, a letter in her hand*

TATIANA:                   Oh, why did he return?  
                              Again Onegin has crossed my path  
                              Like some relentless apparition.  
Oh, how that look of his disturbs my inner soul!  
                              There passions long asleep  
                              Reawaken live and whole.

                              I am again that child naive and candid,  
                              The girl in love that long ago he reprimanded.

*Onegin appears, stands motionless for a moment, then hurries over to Tatiana and kneels at her feet. She looks at him, with neither surprise nor anger, then motions him to rise.*

TATIANA:                   I beg you .... Please do rise.  
                              As once before, I shall speak frankly.  
                              Onegin, can you still recall  
                              That dreaded hour  
                              I came to meet my destiny  
                              And meekly swallowed the gall  
                              Of your aloof reply?

ONEGIN:                   Oh, spare me! Show a little mercy!  
                              Then I was stupid,  
                              But now repentant.

TATIANA:                   A girl, I came to you unguarded;  
                              My heart I made an open book.  
                              With what return was I rewarded?  
                              Only a cold and frosty look.  
  
                              For you, my love had no attraction,  
                              Too lowly for your satisfaction.  
                              Perhaps you found it nothing new ....  
                              I shudder even to review

Those chilling words, the formal manner,  
 That solemn reprimand.  
 Yet what should I expect?  
 Kind, though severe,  
 You were a perfect man of honor  
 And your behavior quite correct.

You found me little to your liking;  
 To a rustic world you never warmed.  
 But why the turn-about so striking?  
 Am I so wondrously transformed?

Or does the pride of high position,  
 The social status that I scorn,  
 Appeal perhaps to your ambition?  
 Because my husband, battle-torn,

Has thereby gained in courtly favor?  
 Or that the rumor of my fall  
 Would circulate to one and all  
 And lend your game a spicy flavor?

Because my name might fill a gap,  
 Add one more feather to your cap?

ONEGIN:

Ah! Have mercy!  
 Deny that in my agony and fever  
 Your scornful eyes can only find  
 The cunning of a cold deceiver!  
 To suffering are you so blind?

Oh, raging torrent of emotion  
 That bears the heart upon the flood,  
 With naught but reason, pale and frozen,  
 To tame the tempest of the blood!

I come before you humbly kneeling,  
 To pour my passionate desire,  
 Unto your tender heart revealing  
 A love that you alone inspire.

TATIANA:

You move me.

ONEGIN:                   Tears . . . Precious pearls!  
This earth contains no greater treasure.

BOTH:                    Ah! Happiness was ours so nearly.  
                              So nearly! So nearly!  
                              Ah, so near!

TATIANA:                But my fate is sealed; I am not free.  
I have a husband, and know my duty,  
                              Also yours. Yes, you must go!  
                              I beg you, leave me.

ONEGIN:                   The moment I've found you  
                              Am I to leave you? No!

                              Ah! Hand in hand on golden rays,  
                              I find in you my destination.  
Your lovely smile, your tender gaze  
                              To watch in melting adoration.

                              To catch the magic of your eyes,  
                              The grandeur of your soul to learn,  
Upon your breast to lie, to freeze and burn,  
                              To perish there in paradise.  
Ah, pure paradise and blissful peace eternal!

TATIANA:                Onegin, show yourself the man of honor  
                              That you are inside.  
I appeal to dignity and manly pride:  
                              This must be final.

ONEGIN:                   No, I shall never part from you.  
                              No, never!

TATIANA:                Why should I lie? Why still conceal it?  
                              Ah! I love you still!

ONEGIN:                   You love me still!  
Can you suppose that now I'll leave you?  
                              Oh, rapture! Ecstasy!  
                              Again Tatiana's former glory!



**TATIANA:** No, no! There's no return; we are too late.  
In Gremin's hand resides my fate.  
To him alone I swore a vow,  
And I shall not forswear it now.

**ONEGIN:** Banish me not, for I adore you;  
Take not away the enchanted wine;  
Savor the feast I spread before you;  
Heaven decrees that you are mine!

Toward love our lives have ever pointed;  
My own I promise now in pledge.  
Made one, by destiny annointed,  
We must not tremble on the edge.

Too far we've come for backward turning;  
Too fierce the fire within us burning.  
All hated bonds I tear apart  
To offer you a lover's heart.

**TATIANA:** Onegin, I shall not surrender.  
With someone else I've cast my lot.  
Although my heart remains still tender,  
I shall be firm and fail him not.

(From my resolve I must not waver,  
However torn by his appeal.  
Yes, I must stifle what I feel.  
My honor, my duty are sacred.  
No, I shall not waver.)

**ONEGIN:** Oh, turn not from a tortured plea!  
You love me, you love me,  
And by heavenly decree  
You're mine forevermore!

**TATIANA:** Eugene, I leave you.  
I implore you!

**ONEGIN:** No! No! No! No!  
Ah, Tatiana, come with me.

**TATIANA:**                               **No, no, I shall not waver.**

**ONEGIN:**                               **I worship you, I live for you!**

**TATIANA:**                               **No more, Eugene.**

**ONEGIN:**                               **I worship you!**

**TATIANA:**                               **Goodby forever!**

**ONEGIN:**                               **You are mine!**

*With final determination, she leaves the room.*

**ONEGIN:**                               **Alone! I've lost!**  
**Only the dark is left!**

*He rushes off.*

**Fine**

## About Donald Pippin

The musical career of Donald Pippin, Artistic Director and founder of POCKET OPERA, has spanned over six decades and as many time zones. Born in Zebulon, North Carolina and educated at Harvard University, Donald began his career as a pianist/accompanist at Balanchine's School for American Ballet in New York City. He moved to San Francisco in 1952 and has been an integral part of that city's artistic life since then. Audiences have followed him loyally from his start at the 'hungry i' and Opus One in North Beach, through nearly two decades of presenting a weekly chamber music series at the Old Spaghetti Factory, to his present-day fame as the genius behind one of San Francisco's most popular operatic institutions.

Donald's first translation came in 1968, in the course of preparing Mozart's one-act opera *Bastien und Bastienne* for performance as part of his chamber music series. The opera, and his singing translation of it, were immediate successes with San Francisco audiences. From that point on, Donald dedicated himself to the task of producing singable, intelligible, and literate English versions of both well-loved classics and lesser-known gems of operatic literature. His repertoire has grown to include over sixty translations, many of which have been used by the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center, the San Francisco Opera Center, the San Diego Opera, the Juilliard School of Music, and the Aspen Music Festival, to name a few.

## About Pocket Opera

In 1977, a group of Pippin enthusiasts organized and incorporated POCKET OPERA as a non-profit organization dedicated to presenting and disseminating Donald's work, with Donald at the helm as Artistic Director. Within two years, POCKET OPERA had outgrown cafés and restaurants. Today, POCKET OPERA's season spans six months and includes more than twenty performances and several premieres.

The company's sense of community remains, however, with an emphasis on the immediacy and beauty of opera performed in intimate venues. Donald Pippin is famed for his English translations of well- and lesser-known operas, and his work is highly respected alike by professionals in the field, loyal *appassionati*, and first-time opera goers.

Donald has been hailed by *The San Francisco Chronicle* as an artist "whose genius for staging operas without pretension, yet preserving the marriage of words and music, is legendary." His approach to opera is to convey the story as clearly as possible while using a minimum of costumes and props. To this end, he intersperses droll plot summaries at points throughout the performance which both explain and entertain. His inimitable and coherent singing translations, combined with the talents of accomplished vocalists and a chamber orchestra (dubbed the Pocket Philharmonic), ensure productions of superior quality that are accessible to contemporary audiences from all walks of life.

POCKET OPERA's season runs from February through June, and in 2001 the company will produce performances of ten operas in five venues throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The repertoire for 2001 will include *The Italian Girl In Algiers* (Rossini), *La Taviata*, *Falstaff* and *Oberto* (Verdi), *The Two Widows* (Smetana), *Eugene Onegin* (Tchaikovsky), *Salon Viardot* (a one-woman show presented by Marta Johansen), *Giulio Cesare* (Handel), and *Così fan tutte* (Mozart).

# DONALD PIPPIN - ENGLISH VERSIONS

<b>AUBER</b> Fra Diavolo	<b>LECOCQ</b> The Daughter of Madame Angot	<b>SCHUBERT</b> The Wedding Roast (*trio op 104)
<b>BACH</b> The Coffee Cantata	<b>LEHAR</b> The Merry Widow	<b>SMETANA</b> The Bartered Bride The Two Widows
<b>BELLINI</b> Norma	<b>MOZART</b> Bastien and Bastienne Cosi Fan Tutte Don Giovanni The Magic Flute The Marriage of Figaro Yanked from the Harem ( <i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i> )	<b>STRAVINSKY</b> The Soldier's Tale
<b>BIZET</b> Carmen Don Procopio	<b>MUSSORGSKY</b> The Marriage	<b>von SUPPE</b> My Fair Galatea
<b>CHABRIER</b> An Education Incomplete The Star ( <i>L'Etoile</i> )	<b>NICOLAI</b> The Merry Wives of Windsor	<b>TCHAIKOVSKY</b> Eugene Onegin
<b>CIMAROSA</b> The Secret Marriage	<b>OFFENBACH</b> The Bandits La Belle Hélène Bluebeard The Bridge of Sighs The Cat That Turned Into a Woman The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein Marriage by Lantern Orpheus in the Underworld La Périchole The Princess of Trebizonde The Tales of Hoffman La Vie Parisienne	<b>TELEMANN</b> Pimpinone
<b>DONIZETTI</b> Anna Bolena Betly The Daughter of the Regiment Don Pasquale The Elixir of Love Lucia di Lammermoor Lucrezia Borgia Maria Padilla Mary Stuart Roberto Devereux The Tutor in a Tangle ( <i>L'Ajo nell'Inbarazzo</i> )	<b>PERGOLESE</b> La Serva Padrona	<b>VERDI</b> Ernani Falstaff The Gang of Bandits ( <i>I Masnadieri</i> ) King for a Day Luisa Miller Oberto Rigoletto Stiffelio La Traviata
<b>von FLOTOW</b> Martha	<b>ROSSINI</b> The Barber of Seville La Cenerentola Count Ory The Italian Girl in Algiers	<b>WAGNER</b> No Love Allowed ( <i>Das Liebesverbot</i> )
<b>GOUNOD</b> The Doctor in Spite of Himself		<b>von WEBER</b> Abu Hassan Der Freischütz
<b>HAYDN</b> The Apothecary The Budding Soprano		<b>*FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES*</b> The Escape Alice in Opera Land A Mini Magic Flute

*Pocket Opera*

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# THE POCKET OPERA REPERTOIRE

1978:

Mozart *Così fan Tutte*\*  
 Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
 Handel *Xerxes*  
 Purcell *Dido and Aeneas*  
 Verdi *King for a Day*  
 Handel *Orlando*  
 Donizetti *The Tutor in a Tangle*  
 Handel *Rinaldo*

1979:

Rossini *La Cenerentola*\*  
 Verdi *Stiffelio*\*  
 Stravinsky *The Rake's Progress*\*  
 Handel *Teseo*  
 Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
 Handel *Admeto*  
 Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
 Handel *Giulio Cesare*  
 Handel *Agrippina*  
 Handel *Alcina*

1980:

Rossini *The Italian Girl in Algiers*\*  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*\*  
 Donizetti *Anna Bolena*\*  
 Verdi *Stiffelio*  
 Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
 Schubert *The Conspirators*  
 Handel *Ariodante*  
 Handel *Imeneo*  
 Handel *Xerxes*  
 Handel *Rinaldo*  
 Handel *Teseo*  
 Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
 Stravinsky *The Rake's Progress*  
 Donizetti *Don Pasquale*

1981:

Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*\*  
 Offenbach *La Belle Helene*\*  
 Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*\*  
 Verdi *King for a Day*

1981 (continued):

Mussorgsky *The Marriage Broker*  
 Mozart *Bastien and Bastienne*  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*  
 Handel *Semele*  
 Handel *Acis and Galatea*  
 Purcell *Dido and Aeneas*  
 Haydn *The Apothecary*

1982:

Verdi *Luisa Miller*\*  
 Von Flotow *Martha*\*  
 Donizetti *Lucia di Lammermoor*\*  
 Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
 Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
 Verdi *Stiffelio*  
 Donizetti *The Tutor in a Tangle*  
 Handel *Ariodante*  
 Handel *Atalanta*  
 Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*  
 Offenbach *La Belle Helene*

1983:

Tschaikovsky *Eugene Onegin*\*  
 Donizetti *Maria Padilla*\*  
 Nicolai *Merry Wives of Windsor*\*  
 Offenbach *La Perichole*\*  
 Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
 Rossini *The Italian Girl in Algiers*  
 Von Flotow *Martha*  
 Verdi *King for a Day*  
 Donizetti *Anna Bolena*  
 Handel *Orlando*  
 Handel *Teseo*  
 Handel *Deidamia*\*

1984:

Offenbach *The Bridge of Sighs*\*  
 Weber *Der Freischutz*\*  
 Donizetti *Maria Padilla*  
 Handel *Giulio Cesare*

\*Premiere.



## 1984 (continued):

Offenbach *La Perichole*  
 Offenbach *La Belle Helene*  
 Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*  
 Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
 Schubert *The Conspirators*  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*  
 Handel *Agrippina*  
 Handel *Ariodante*  
 Handel *Alcina*

## 1985:

Offenbach *The Bandits*\*  
 Donizetti *Mary Stuart*\*  
 Auber *Fra Diavolo*\*  
 Offenbach *Orpheus in the Underworld*\*  
 Kern *Oh, Boy!*\*  
 Gershwin *Oh, Kay!*\*  
 Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
 Donizetti *The Tutor in a Tangle*  
 Von Flotow *Martha*  
 Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
 Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*  
 Offenbach *The Bridge of Sighs*  
 Handel *Xerxes*  
 Handel *Agrippina*

## 1986:

Rossini *Count Ory*\*  
 Offenbach *The Princess of Trebizonde*\*  
 Tchaikovsky *Eugene Onegin*  
 Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
 Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
 Donizetti *Lucia di Lammermoor*  
 Offenbach *Orpheus in the Underworld*  
 Handel *Teseo*  
 Handel *Alcina*  
 Kern *Oh, Boy!*  
 Gershwin *Oh, Kay!*

## 1987:

Bellini *Norma*\*  
 Mozart *Yanked from the Harem*\*  
 Lehar *The Merry Widow*\*  
 Rossini *Italian Girl in Algiers*  
 Nicolai *Merry Wives of Windsor*  
 Offenbach *Princess of Trebizond*  
 Offenbach *La Belle Helene*  
 Handel *Semele*  
 Handel *Ariodante*

## 1988:

Offenbach *Bluebeard*\*  
 Von Weber *Abu Hassan*\*  
 Donizetti *Betty*\*  
 Bellini *Norma*  
 Verdi *Luisa Miller*  
 Von Flotow *Martha*  
 Offenbach *La Perichole*  
 Handel *Atalanta*  
 Handel *Agrippina*  
 Mozart *Yanked from the Harem*

## 1989:

Bizet *Don Procopio*\*  
 Offenbach *Marriage by Lantern*\*  
 Chabrier *Education Incomplete*\*  
 Von Suppe *My Fair Galatea*\*  
 Handel *Flavio*\*  
 Handel *Giulio Cesare*  
 Schubert *The Conspirators*  
 Mozart *Bastien and Bastienne*  
 Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
 Mozart *Yanked from the Harem*  
 Offenbach *Orpheus*  
 Verdi *King for a Day*

## 1990:

Wagner *No Love Allowed*\*  
 Lecocq *Daughter of M. Angot*\*  
 Haydn *The Apothecary*  
 Handel *Rinaldo*  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*

1990 (*continued*):

Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
Offenbach *Orpheus*

1991:

Cimarosa *The Secret Marriage\**  
Rossini *The Barber of Seville\**  
Stravinsky *The Soldier's Tale\**  
Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*  
Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
Mozart *Yanked from the Harem*  
Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
Handel *Xerxes*  
Handel *Ariodante*

1992:

Offenbach *The Grand Duchess  
of Gerolstein\**  
Donizetti *Roberto Devereux\**  
Haydn *The Budding Soprano\**  
Bach *The Coffee Cantata*  
Rossini *The Barber of Seville*  
Verdi *King for a Day*  
Schubert *The Conspirators*  
Mozart *Bastien and Bastienne*  
Offenbach *La Belle Helene*  
Handel *Teseo*

1993:

Smetana *The Bartered Bride\**  
Offenbach *Orpheus*  
Donizetti *Roberto Devereux*  
Nicolai *Merry Wives of Windsor*  
Von Suppe *My Fair Galatea*  
Handel *Atalanta*  
Mozart *Così fan Tutte*

1994:

Verdi *Rigoletto\**  
Chabrier *The Star\**  
Offenbach *Bluebeard*  
Smetana *The Bartered Bride*  
Mozart *Così fan Tutte*  
Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
Handel *Alcina*  
Handel *Agrippina*

1995:

Donizetti *The Elixir of Love\**  
Donizetti *Maria Padilla*  
Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
Offenbach *The Bridge of Sighs*  
Verdi *Rigoletto*  
Chabrier *The Star*  
Handel *Rinaldo*  
Handel *Giulio Cesare*  
Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*

1996:

Mozart *Don Giovanni\**  
Gounod *The Doctor in Spite of  
Himself\**  
Bizet *Don Procopio*  
Offenbach *The Princess of  
Trebizonde*  
Stravinsky *The Soldier's Tale*  
Handel *Xerxes*  
Donizetti *Mary Stuart*  
Rossini *The Barber of Seville*  
Offenbach *Marriage by Lantern*

1997:

Offenbach *Tales of Hoffmann\**  
Donizetti *Lucrezia Borgia\**  
Mozart *Don Giovanni*  
Mozart *Yanked from the Harem*  
Handel *Ariodante*  
Offenbach *La Vie Parisienne*  
Salon Viardot (Marta Johansen)  
Von Weber *Abu Hassan*  
Schubert *The Conspirators*  
Stravinsky *The Soldier's Tale*

1998:

Mozart *The Magic Flute*\*  
 Verdi *The Gang of Bandits*\*  
     (*I Masnadieri*)  
 Donizetti *Lucrezia Borgia*  
 Donizetti *Don Pasquale*  
 Von Flotow *Martha*  
 Offenbach *Tales of Hoffmann*  
 Handel *Teseo*  
 Lehar *The Merry Widow*  
 Offenbach *La Belle Helene*

1999:

Verdi *Ernani*\*  
 Donizetti *Daughter of the Regiment*\*  
 Bizet *Carmen*\*  
 Verdi *The Gang of Bandits*  
 Verdi *King for a Day*  
 Handel *Agrippina*  
 Rossini *La Cenerentola*  
 Offenbach *Orpheus in the Underworld*  
 Donizetti *Mary Stuart*

2000:

Verdi *La Traviata*\*  
 Offenbach *Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*  
 Donizetti *Roberto Devereux*  
 Cimarosa *The Secret Marriage*  
 Handel *Atalanta*  
 Handel *Orlando*  
 Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro*  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*

2001:

Mozart *A Mini Magic Flute*\*  
     (premiere of shortened children's version)  
 Rossini *The Italian Girl in Algiers*  
 Verdi *La Traviata*  
 Handel *Giulio Cesare*  
 Tchaikovsky *Eugene Onegin*  
 "Salon Viardot" (Maria Johansen)  
 Smetana *The Two Widows*  
 Offenbach *The Cat That Turned Into A Woman*  
 Mozart *Bastien & Bastienne*  
 Mozart *Così fan tutte*  
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